WRITING BY TYPES

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A MANUAL OF COMPOSITION FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS

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PREFACE

Every teacher of composition has found that the student's interest in writing bears a very close relation to the character of the themes he is asked to write. The experimential narrative and the simpler descriptive and expository papers serve their purpose admirably in the early part of a composition course while the beginner is mastering the sentence, the paragraph, and the general mechanics of writing. But there inevitably comes a time when such assignments pall, when the student grows to feel that he is plowing over again the same field.

The idea underlying the present book is that it is a good thing for any one learning to express himself to "try everything once." The varied experience which he will have after doing the exercises here explained will result in his seldom finding himself wholly unprepared for anything he may, in after life, be called upon to write. Few tasks will present themselves to him as absolutely new. Even the more difficult assignments in the

book are not really beyond the powers of the average freshman or sophomore in college. Though the result of his attempt at satire, for example, may not be a work of art, art has a way of surviving such attempts, and the writer learns much from the effort. The subjects here included have been used successfully for some years by the authors, with large numbers of students, in the latter part of the required work in composition.

It is hoped that the book will be the means of correlating more effectively the study of composition and literature. Nothing enables a person better to appreciate a work of art than trying to produce one himself. Experience shows that a student who has attempted to write a familiar essay has a new conception of the type and an enjoyment of the familiar essay in literature which he did not have before. A well-known scholar once remarked that he never really appreciated Fritz Kreisler until he bought a violin and began "to fiddle for himself."

Each chapter in the book has been written in the form of a straight talk to the student, explaining the assignment, telling him what to do and what not to do, and giving him practical advice as to just how to go about writing it. The in-

structor is left free to discuss the form in class and to illustrate it by appropriate models. Even at the expense of some repetition it has seemed best to discuss in each chapter all the things that are necessary for the assignment. Consequently it is possible for the teacher to use the topics in any order that happens to fit best into the work of his particular class. The arrangement followed in the book, from considerations of variety and difficulty, is one that has been found satisfactory in practice.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

		PAGE
I	The Critical Essay	3
II	The Feature Article An Exercise in Popular Exposition	18
III	The Editorial	33
IV	The Interview	46
V	Informal Argument	63
VI	The Business Letter	77
VII	The After-Dinner Speech	88
VIII	Satire	103
IX	An Exercise in Verse	120
X	Parody	138
XI	The Character Sketch	155
XII	The Local Color Study	172
XIII	Dialogue	186
XIV	The Episode An Exercise in Writing Fiction	199
XV	The Familiar Essay	214

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THE CRITICAL ESSAY

THE critical essay contributes to the pleasure one may derive from reading a book. Everybody knows that one of the keenest of the delights that accompany any adventure is that of talking it all over with somebody else. It is just this enjoyment that the critical essay lends to reading. But the pleasure that comes from talking about the experiences of life is not our only reason for telling others what we have been doing, and listening to them in turn, for frequently we find ourselves learning something about how to solve the problems with which all our activities are constantly bringing us face to face. Likewise from reading the critical essay we get, in addition to the pleasure it affords, a knowledge of literature that probably we should never have reached by ourselves. Criticism when it deals with authors we know, is as absorbing as gossip,

but unlike gossip, it will give us judgments and opinions that are worth having.

Criticism is too often identified with the business of finding fault, of picking flaws. This is due to a misunderstanding of what the term criticism really means. A criticism is in reality a judgment, based upon the critic's knowledge of life and his appreciation of literature. Often the purpose of literary criticism is simply to interpret, to reveal those qualities which may not be apparent to the general reader, but which the critic, in the light of a cultivated perception, sees. There is no better way of conveying your sense of an author's achievement than by pointing out specifically to your reader those aspects of his work which you admire. If a particular scene has stirred you, if a certain character remains vividly in your memory, if you feel that you have been made aware of something in the world which did not exist for you before, discuss these in your essay. If, after a careful reading you find certain shortcomings, you must speak of them, but your highest function as a critic is to reveal the virtues of a literary product, the good qualities of an author's work as a whole, and thus to increase the pleasure others may find in it.

The first question the critic must ask himself is, "What has the author of this book tried to do?" If a book is misunderstood in its intention, any criticism of it will be worse than useless. Now the trained critic is in a particularly fortunate position because of his experience and is able to perceive quickly what an author is really trying to accomplish. Let us suppose, for example, that a novelist decides to write a satire but that he finds it most convenient to present his ideas in the form of a story. If the critic sees only the story and is blind to the satire, surely his criticism will not help any one to really understand the book. Of course in most cases a writer does not arbitrarily employ for his own ends a form usually devoted to other uses, unless his device is so transparent as to be obvious at a glance; but in many cases there are satirical passages in a novel of which the critic must be at once aware, if he is to obtain the full measure of the author's meaning. It is his deeper insight which makes him a critic. In the majority of books, however, any intelligent reader can discover the author's purpose if he reads carefully.

Seizing upon a writer's purpose as he reads, the critic is likewise forming a judgment as to

how well this purpose has been achieved. As he lays down the book, he asks himself whether it is really a success or just a commendable attempt. If the latter, it will be necessary for him to show in what respects the book has succeeded, in what it has failed. If the former, he will have few faults to point out, and many virtues to discuss. The skill with which Thackeray has written *Vanity Fair* is illustrated in his portrayal of Major Dobbin. Tall, ungainly, wholly lacking in brilliance and social grace, he might easily have been an object of ridicule to the reader, as he was to Amelia's friends. But Major Dobbin's other qualities—courage, unselfishness, loyalty—indicate that Thackeray did not intend him to be ridiculous. And he has made him a dignified and lovable man, whom no reader can forget. The novelist here has entirely succeeded in making the character what he intended him to be. A critic would surely emphasize so complete an achievement of an author's intention.

Literary criticism, if it is well done, should be interesting for itself as well as valuable for its judgment upon literature. It is the critic's business to place a book against a broad background of varied experience and extensive reading. By

his sympathy with mankind, his reflection upon art and life, his charm of presentation, he evokes a response in the reader both to the work he is discussing and to himself. Frequently by a happy illustration from his own experience or observation, or from history, a passing allusion, an apt quotation, an illuminating comparison with some other work of literature, even by a flash of wit or an epigram, he is able to bring home to the reader the soundness of his opinions. Criticism with qualities such as these will itself have literary value.

The judgment of books depends not merely upon a knowledge of literature and its technique, but even more basically upon a knowledge of life. The student obviously does not have the advantage of mature experience and greatly diversified reading. Yet every man has gone through certain experiences that have left him wiser, and has seen other men go through difficulties and emerge defeated or triumphant. If you have thought at all about existence and what it means, you have a fundamental basis upon which to discuss the value of a book. For literature is primarily a revelation of life, and it may be legitimately judged in reference to your own convictions as to

what life means. The novel tells the story of certain people and their relationships; the drama discloses men and women in the grip of circumstances from which they must free themselves to obtain happiness; a poem develops some theme of vital beauty growing out of an experience of life or the poet's dream of life. Give yourself the pleasure of expressing your own opinion, without trying to make it conform to what other critics have said. A criticism based upon *your* knowledge of life will be much more interesting to you and your reader. Any one who has thought honestly about the problems which every one must face can write a critical essay.

The most obvious element in life which literature reflects is human character. The people you meet in fiction, in plays, in narrative poetry, are in greater or less degree like those you meet in life. Indeed their similarity to living men and women is largely responsible for the interest you take in them, and in the books where they appear. David Copperfield, Wordsworth's Michael, the mother in Masefield's "The Widow in the Bye Street,"—such characters make us say at once, "I've known people like that." And we proceed

to make their acquaintance and to judge them just as though they were our friends or enemies. For example, we discover the true nature of a person best by his actions, by what he does in a critical situation, or when confronted with a problem involving the welfare of other people. Often when you think of one of your friends, you wonder how he would act in an emergency, and if you are intimate with him, you probably are sure that you know. You expect him to act in accordance with his nature. Similarly the creator of characters in a story, poem, or play must convince you that the conduct of his people in every situation is consistent with what you already know of them. If you are not convinced, record your doubts and your reasons for them in the course of your critical essay. If the characters are real to you, mention them and their human prototypes of your acquaintance, in support of your appreciation of the author's picture of life. The creatures of romance or of fantasy present a slightly different problem, though they too may have some resemblance to reality. Your reaction to them will perhaps be similar to the spirit of Whistler's retort when some one said to him, "Mr. Whistler,

I never saw a sunset like the one you have painted." "No," was the reply, "but don't you wish you could?"

Literature also reflects the changes in the lives of people which are produced by successive events. The relation of such events to one another in a novel, for example, determines the faith of the reader in the story as a picture of actual life. It is the probability of the occurrences as they follow one another, or the plausibility of the whole narrative, that makes us believe in it and say, "That is true to life." To estimate this intelligently, you must recognize that in a novel no question should arise as to the probability of anything that happens. Once a situation has been created, every succeeding action of the story must follow naturally from it. If a man falls off the edge of a cliff onto rocks many feet below, the apparent fate of Sherlock Holmes in one of Conan Doyle's tales, the reader surely must be credulous if he believes that this man is not killed. Or if a man and a girl have parted under conditions that make a reconciliation impossible, to bring them together again is plainly absurd. In constructing your critical opinion you must weigh carefully whatever incidents you are doubtful about, and

then estimate them in relation to their cause. In presenting your opinions, you may describe a situation, but do not retell the story, for to do so will only bore your reader and hinder his appreciation of the judgment you have formed. If you have clear in your own mind the success or failure of the writer in making his readers believe in what he has related, in creating in them a conviction that the story could not have developed in any other way, you will not be tempted to make this mistake. It is in the conclusion of a story that the novelist is most likely to violate plausibility, for he often wishes to change the natural ending of a tale and make it conform to what he conceives to be the desires of his readers. This tampering with the inevitable outcome of the story has given rise to the prevailing objection to the so-called "happy ending." But any part of a novel may be lacking in plausibility, and in the course of your essay you should note such shortcomings. On the other hand, if the author's succession of events is in accordance with your experience, say so, and perhaps illustrate from incidents in your own life or the lives of others whom you know.

A third element in literature that has its basis in human experience is the author's way of look-

ing at life, and the convictions he has reached concerning it. No man can escape the effect upon him of his experiences. As his temperament inclines him to be hopeful or despairing, as the world has used him well or ill, he may look upon life as a pleasant thing, or as a stern duty, as something to be lived courageously, with hope, or with resignation, or he may think the world a place in which nothing matters. The essayist sometimes writes about his philosophy directly; sometimes it is implicit in what he says. The lyric poet, consciously or unconsciously, expresses it in everything he writes, for his writing is subjective, reveals himself. And the novelist in telling a story likewise embodies his own convictions and beliefs. As the characters are more clearly revealed, as the fate, the joy or sorrow of each one of them comes home to us, we are made aware of the novelist's philosophy, of the faith by which he lives. It is for this reason that we say that George Meredith, for example, was an optimist, or that Hardy is convinced that man is the sport of Fate. Sometimes a novelist will step out of his story, as did Thackeray, to discuss with the reader for a moment the weaknesses and the virtues of mankind. But whether directly or

indirectly, in all literature the writer's vision of life is disclosed. This vision should be a significant point of discussion in the critical essay.

But people and events, facts and ideas do not make up the whole of life. Each one of us is conscious of impulses within himself which we call emotions. Love, hate, jealousy, ambition, are some of these. And the artistic expression of an emotion in words is the purpose of the form of writing called lyric poetry. A man's ability to read a lyric poem appreciatively is measured by the extent to which he is capable of sharing, at least imaginatively, in the emotion which the poet is expressing. If you find that you do not share it at all, if indeed it is so foreign to your temperament that you do not see what it is, you must be content with saying so. You may add in some cases that the poet has not convinced you that *he* feels what his utterance expresses, that, in other words, he is insincere. This is a legitimate criticism, if it is your honest opinion. When Masefield writes

> I must down to the seas again, to the lonely sea and the sky,
> And all I ask is a tall ship and a star to steer her by, . . .

if you have yourself no strong love of the sea, you may fail to appreciate the inner compulsion of that "must," though if you read "Sea Fever" through, you are not likely to doubt that Masefield himself feels it. If you are stirred, however, your criticism will naturally take the form of some expression of your own sea-fever, as it rises within you in sympathy with his. The ever present temptation of youthful critics of lyric poetry is to look for something—a lesson, facts, a story—which is not there and could not in the nature of the lyric be there, and not finding it, to pronounce what they have read meaningless. All that can be said to a man in this case is, "Keep on reading lyric poetry, and some day life will teach you to appreciate it." Until one has developed an emotional range, one's ability to criticize the lyric is limited.

Less intimately related to human experience than the characters of a novel or the emotion of a lyric poem, and therefore to be judged by somewhat different standards, is the author's style. Clearness, simplicity, intensity, the choice of words for their richness of meaning, the rhythm of the sentences, unexpected turns of phrase,—such qualities of style are among the subtlest

factors in literary art. But an appreciation of them is developed in most people only after they have done a great deal of reading in many different authors. If the style of an author wins your admiration, by all means include some discussion of it and perhaps illustrate by passages which you admire. But if your interest is limited to the ideas or the story, or if, as is more frequently the case, you are vaguely conscious of a pleasing or unusual quality about the style of something you have read without being able to say why, do not feel that you have to discuss style at all. For if you do, you are in danger of uttering mere insufficient, undiscriminating praise. Just to say that "Thackeray's style is very clear throughout," or that "in reading Keats I was impressed with the beauty of the style," is futile. It is so obvious that these qualities will be found in Thackeray and in Keats that it is childish to point them out unless you can add something to your reader's perception of them.

A beginner in literary criticism, especially an involuntary beginner, is apt to evade the true duty of the critic because he feels that his equipment is insufficient. A common evasion is praising a book which he does not really like, for a number of

motives which need not be here discussed. Above all, make your criticism absolutely *honest*. If you do not feel that an author's style has distinction, do not say that it has, because some other critic you have read has said so. If you are unable as yet to determine whether or not he has a wide knowledge of life, do not accept some one else's opinion, and put it down because it is "the thing to say." Another mistake is to set down as a criticism of a given book a number of glittering generalities about literature as a whole. Try instead to formulate generalizations which express the distinguishing qualities of the book before you as opposed to any other you have read, and illustrate each idea by frequent reference to passages in the book itself. Again, do not attempt a criticism of a book you have read some time in the past, without refreshing your memory of it; for good criticism is the result of enthusiasm. Finally, as in all that you write, consider your ideas before you begin, and decide upon their sequence and the relative weight you will give to each.

To improve the quality of your critical writing, you must broaden your knowledge of life. And if you are really interested in people, in the difficul-

ties they get into and their struggles to get out of them, you will continually extend your reading. As your experience matures and your knowledge of literature widens, you will find it easier and easier to criticize the books you read. It has been said that reading, if it stirs the imagination, makes a man "more complex and more potent." As you grow more sensitive to those suggestions and implications which are perceptible only to the person who has read a great deal, your increasing power will make whatever criticism you write more interesting and valuable. To say something worthwhile about books—this should be your desire in every criticism. To realize this desire you must develop a trained judgment and appreciation. Then you may do what every writer of the critical essay should do—help others to enjoy literature. Good criticism is creative: by it the product of one artist's mind is made more bright, more beautiful, in the clear light of another's intelligence.

THE FEATURE ARTICLE

AN EXERCISE IN POPULAR EXPOSITION

THE feature article is any form of popular exposition. When you know something that the other man does n't know, you have the material for a feature article. The subject may be anything under the sun, provided it can be made comprehensible to the average man. Magazines today are filled with such titles as, How the Mind Causes and Cures Disease, Just How Dangerous Lightning Is, The X-Ray as a Life-Saver, What I Get out of My Trips to New York, Dangers Men Have to Meet in Sailing the Great Lakes, A Woman's Ten Commandments for a Happy Marriage, Curious Ways of Getting Hurt, A Capable Beggar Makes from $15 to $500 a Day, The Education I Wish I Might Have Had, How the Hotel Clerk Sizes You Up, Experiences of a Taxi-Driver. There is no form of writing in which the subject counts for more and the name and reputation of the author for so little. If you have a desire

to break into print, feature writing will give you your best opportunity. And whether you have such a desire or not, it is the form of all forms which the untrained writer with something to tell may approach with some confidence of success.

The purpose of the feature article is not, however, merely to inform, but to inform entertainingly. The reader, it is true, is eager for information, particularly if it appeals to his desire to get on in the world, or his sense of the picturesque or the dramatic; but before he will actually absorb that information, it must be presented to him in an attractive way. The feature writer is not the writer of a text-book, who can set down facts and feel content if his statements are unquestionable; he must draw people to read what he has written, he must hold their attention close to his account, and he must send them away not only better informed but also pleased.

A feature article whose material is unusual, or romantic, or helpful, and whose presentation is lively, will always be interesting. It will have an added appeal if it be also timely. Indeed, many articles depend entirely for their interest on matters which are temporarily engaging the

attention of the public. It often happens that in gathering material not directly connected with anything conspicuously before the public at the time, one finds in it elements that are related to the popular interest of the moment. For example, a college student recently when collecting information for an article describing the career of King Khama, a remarkable ruler of an African tribe, found that during his long reign this king had been an ardent exponent of Prohibition, and had carried on a successful struggle with the traders who tried to sell intoxicants to his subjects. This effort allied the subject of the story with the much discussed Eighteenth Amendment in America, and the article was promptly purchased by the New York *Times,* and published in its Sunday Magazine.

And now, we may ask, where will you find your material for a feature article? Obviously if you have had a strange or thrilling experience, your problem is solved. One man in college goes with his professor of Anthropology on an expedition to Labrador to study the Indians there; another ships before the mast and sails to South America; a third seeks a job in the wheat fields of North Dakota during harvesting. Any of them could

make a feature article out of his adventures. If, however, you have had no such unusual experience, you need not assume that you have nothing worth writing about. Many experiences and observations are interesting although they are partly within the knowledge of every one. Commonplace material may be interesting for various reasons: It may tell the reader, for example, how to make money by investing his savings, how to keep young by a regular course of exercise, how to make his home attractive; in short, it may give him information which he can use. Again, it may encourage him by telling him how problems greater than his own have been solved by some one else; how another man by courage and persistence has turned failure into success. Or, it may be interesting simply because it presents human nature in a light in which he has never seen it before, or expresses certain ideas about people which he has always held, but never formulated. What happens to his neighbor is as important to the average reader as anything on the other side of the world. If your experiences will excite and thrill, if they will help or encourage or inform, they will furnish you with adequate material for a feature article.

You need not, in fact, go beyond the limits of your own town or your college to find material for a class assignment which later might be printed in your home paper, a college publication, or even a nationally known newspaper or magazine. Perhaps you or your neighbors at home have discovered new uses for a Ford car; perhaps there is a local "character" with strange habits and an unusual life story; perhaps there is some natural wonder—a cave, a rock formation, an underground river—which has never been written of for the public. The college or university is an even more promising field, because of the universal interest nowadays in young people and in education. Suppose you were to find out from the "flunk-outs" in your class the reasons to which they attribute their failure; or investigate the records made in college by a dozen successful graduates; or study unique methods used by men who are working their way through; or tell in a popular way about a new department of instruction which has been established. Even without resorting to silly questionnaires on such subjects as, "How many undergraduates have never kissed a girl?" (or boy, as the case may be)

you will find a rich field for feature articles all around you.

It is evident that in the case of the feature article, which competes for popular attention with the short story, the novelette, and the advertisement, the beginning is of especial importance. Many writers successfully challenge the reader's attention at the outset by a striking statement, in which they present a point of salient interest in the subject they are going to deal with. It would be an unusual reader who would not be lured to go on reading an article which began:

> Movieland is something like the Klondike in the old days of the gold rush. The most amazing people have grown wealthy in amazing ways. Luck and fortunate circumstances have made and ruined as many movie fortunes as deliberate effort or mistakes in judgment.

Another way to begin is with an incident so unusual in character as to arouse the reader's curiosity concerning what is to follow:

> In the height of last summer's hilarity at Coney Island a prim-looking Pennsylvania schoolma'am

stirred up one of our daily ripples of excitement by walking into the ocean, up to her neck, fully clad in her street clothes.

This served as the opening of an article dealing with amusement parks and how people who frequent them may throw off restraint and do things they would never do under ordinary circumstances. Again, the opening may present a situation interesting for its suggestion of danger, mystery, adventure:

For months at a time during the past few years a little ship may have been seen floating around a certain spot just off the Irish coast of Donegal. Barges lay in her vicinity; barges laden with incredible tangles of pipes and cables. Boats pulled around from barge to ship and fussy little launches came from the coast, remained an hour or two, and then departed. Occasionally a grim gray destroyer glided up, moored for a time, and then steamed away. But the little ship remained, and strangers in those parts wondered what she was doing there.

Other effective ways of beginning will doubtless be suggested by the nature of your subject.

The great danger of an opening which arrests

the reader's attention at the start is that it may awaken expectations which the body of your article will be unable to fulfil. This may mean that you have shot your bolt in the first paragraph, and that you have not really enough material for a whole article. In this case discard what you have written and choose another subject. Or it may mean that you have been content to make the opening interesting, without exerting much effort to hold the reader afterward. It will not do to preface a dull and statistical account of the development of motor-boat construction with a couple of paragraphs of adventure, however striking, which you encountered the previous summer on a cruise, and expect any one to read through to the end. You must never relax in your endeavor to hold attention by the way you handle the substance—and there must be substance—of what you have to say.

For the body of your article, you must plan beforehand. You would not attempt a piece of extended writing without making a preliminary sketch, any more than you would build a bridge without drawings. The initial move is to divide your material up into parts, whether they are narrative episodes illustrating a single idea, or

steps in a process, or stages of an experience, or pieces of advice. The sequence of these parts will be determined by the nature of the material. If, for example, you are doing the simplest form of feature article, the narrative of a single unusual experience that you have had, your sequence will be determined by chronology. For instance: a student in a feature article on "Life in the Dakota Wheat Fields in Threshing Time" tells first of the ride on the trans-continental express, with glimpses of the tramps, also bound for the wheat fields, who ride in the coal-pits of the tender, on boards across the brake-rods, or on top of the trucks. Next he tells how, with a number of these tramps, he was hired at the station at Bismarck, North Dakota, by a farmer who had driven into town to pick up a threshing crew, and who promised them six dollars a day "and good grub." Next he tells of a typical day's work, beginning at four-thirty with the cry, "Up and water your horses," showing us the interminable hours of loading, driving, pitching, loading, driving, pitching. Finally he describes the most interesting feature of it all, the strange assortment of human driftwood that makes up the crew:

Alf, the I. W. W.; the little, wiry, silent man with a wife and children back home to think about and work for; the "Canuck" from Alberta, who is bald at thirty and can talk about nothing but women; Jim, the Kentuckian who has invented the airplane and had the secret stolen from him, and who believes that "Roosevelt was a great man, that war is hell, and that every one must die." The article ends with a brief reference to the return home. Each of the topics is dealt with in a paragraph or a closely related group of paragraphs, and the effect of the whole is an ease and clarity which can only be the result of careful outlining beforehand. Other kinds of material will call for other arrangements—but you must have some plan.

If your material lends itself to narrative treatment, if it deals with human experience in any form, you should avail yourself of all the methods of narrative art to make it vivid. For instance, a feature article on salvaging vessels during the war proceeded by a series of incidents, each one of which involved action, suspense, and thrilling adventure. One such episode relates an experience which occurred during the operation to

retrieve the $25,000,000 lost in the sinking of the *Laurentic:*

> Feeling fairly secure, the salvors determined to get on with their job. Report has it that a diver donned his dress, his helmet was screwed on, and the air pumps began to heave as he dropped down to resume operations. He had been down but a short time when he felt himself plucked off his feet by a mighty pull on his life line and air pipe. He struggled to right himself, but it was quite useless. An irresistible force dragged him upwards; then he felt himself being drawn through the sea like a salmon at the end of a line.
>
> Something was running away with him. It was an awful experience. He wondered what had happened and how it would end. His senses began to reel; he found a difficulty in breathing.
>
> Somehow he managed to keep his head and act as the emergency demanded, closing the valve by which the air escaped from his helmet. A minute later he broke the surface. He could hear the seas slapping the top of his helmet as he was dragged along at a smart pace. His heart pounded, a terrible humming droned in his ears, but he strove hard to retain his senses.

The article continues with an amazing account of the rescue of forty men entombed in a sub-

marine fast in the mud beneath the sea off the Scotch coast. At last the bow of the unfortunate vessel was raised to the surface.

> It was a weird sight. Great arc lamps lit the scene, and under their glare the salvage men attacked the steel hull of the K 13 with oxyacetylene blowpipes. Every one was desperately anxious, afraid that the submarine might slip. Under the intense heat of the blowpipes, the steel grew soft and melted. Gradually, laboriously, the salvors burned their way through the stout outer plates.
>
> They now made an onslaught on the inner hull, directing the flame on the steel shell. The metal glowed and flowed. A rush of air leaped upward from the interior of the vessel and blew out the roaring flame of the blowpipe.
>
> "Get us some matches!" the divers called to those above. Under their very noses, a hand from inside the ship suddenly slid through the hole in the metal, the fingers holding up a box of matches.
>
> "Here you are!" said a cheery voice and the divers knew that all was well.

Obviously, the success of this kind of feature article depends upon the vitality of the incident and the vividness of your narration.

If your material is of a scientific or technical

character, it is more difficult to treat and you must be at special pains to make it interesting. In the case of subjects which may touch your reader personally, such as a great discovery in medicine, the development of a cheap gasoline substitute, or the radio telephone, you have only to be clear to insure his reading your article. But if the subject merely piques his intellectual curiosity, your success in getting him to read will depend upon your ability to make your discussion of it as vivid and humanly appealing as possible. Avoid technical terms, be concrete and pictorial wherever possible, and use homely illustrations to make difficult points clear. Here is an illustration of all three suggestions:

> Have you ever seen a butterfly's wing, *really* seen one? You have n't if you have merely looked at it with the naked eye; because then you have only seen its fine velvety texture. But if you look at it under a microscope, magnified a hundred times, the beautiful reds, blues, yellows, and greens which comprise the brilliant livery of the insect will appear as hundreds of minute scales, which overlap one another like tiles on a roof. The butterfly's wing is covered with scales just as a fish is. Each scale is flask-shaped, with its narrow end fitted

> into a tiny socket of the wing structure. When the scales are rubbed off, nothing remains but a transparent substance traversed by veins.

You can often stimulate the reader's interest by the mention of striking details, as in the following account of experiments in the transplanting of hearts:

> Stohr also learned that the heart is extremely jealous of its functions. When a new heart was implanted in a body where there was already one, without being properly oriented, they got along about as well as two roosters in one barn-yard. The two hearts battled for the blood-stream. If both were fortunate enough to obtain enough blood, there was no danger to their existence and both developed. In most cases, however, the original heart being first on the spot gained supremacy over the new heart, and the development of the latter ceased.

Without sacrificing accuracy you can in this way present scientific material in popular form.

Probably the last difficulty you will encounter is choosing a title. And to this problem much that has been said about the opening applies with equal force. The title should lure the reader on to read your article. It should either convey

clearly the topic of your article or hint at it in such a way as to make the reader wish to find out what it is. "Human Nature with the Brakes Off," "Fish Are as Queer as Folks," "The Wonders of the Earth's Front-Yard," "The Oldest Debate in the World," are good titles. But devising new titles is as dangerous as devising arresting first paragraphs, because it leads one into artificiality or absurdity. This is especially true of titles in the form of questions. Such captions as, "What Would You Do If You Had To Raise Twenty-five Million Dollars in Three Weeks?" "How Does She Go at the Gate?" "Have You an Educated Heart?" undoubtedly command attention, but it is not altogether respectful attention. Many a well-written, worthwhile feature article has gone unread because its author—doubtless after a real strain upon his ingenuity—gave it a cheap, flamboyant title. Your title should be as novel and stimulating as is consistent with dignity; and this holds true of everything you say in a feature article.

THE EDITORIAL

THE editorial is a statement of considered opinion by one whose business it is to comment on matters of public interest. One of the editorial writer's first functions is to point out for people who do not have the knowledge or the discernment to discover it for themselves the meaning of items in the day's news or the import of developments in local, national, or world conditions. Suppose you read in the paper that a contract for a new subway to cost $100,000,000 has just been let. You will not fully understand what this means unless you know more than the mere statement tells you. If, however, you turn to the editorial page and read there that another city has just completed a subway, longer than the one your city has contracted for and harder to build, at a cost of $90,000,000, and that therefore $10,000,000 of the taxpayers' money has gone astray, you comprehend the true importance of the news statement. The editorial writer, however, does not confine himself to interpreting events or aim-

ing at a better understanding on the part of the public of problems and issues. Not infrequently, as one holding certain opinions, he seeks to have them accepted by the public. When he does, his editorial becomes a form of argument. At other times he may write merely an amusing discussion of some unimportant topic, but such comment has been largely superseded in modern journalism by the "column" and other special features. At times he is guided by the general sentiment about him and puts into words the beliefs, or the doubts and protests, of the great body of the people. On such occasions he becomes in a sense, the spokesman of the public mind.

Very few editorials are interesting to the public as a whole. A eulogy upon a great national figure at the time of his death, or the discussion of a coming presidential election has always a universal appeal. On less general matters, the public splits up into groups, with different and often opposed sympathies and beliefs, and every editor writes to his group. What this group is will usually be determined by the policy of the paper, whether it is Republican or Democratic, whether it is with or against the city government, and so on. Some papers and magazines which run edi-

torials are published for even more specialized groups; we have trade papers and innumerable scientific, sporting, and business magazines. And it is conceivable that even within the undergraduate body of a large university, there may be groups analogous to those which exist in the world at large. But for the most part a student writer of editorials is in a fortunate position as regards his public; for it is comparatively small, it is composed of men and women of approximately the same age, bound together by similar activities, and by loyalty to the college. The interests and the sympathies of such a group are not difficult to discover and to stir. To do so requires only an intelligent application of the principles of all editorial writing.

The importance of a thing to any of us would seem perhaps to be limited by the extent to which it touches our affairs, our plans and ambitions. And it is certainly true that whatever in public matters directly bears upon our personal concerns, does interest us vitally. There is no more absorbing topic than tax reduction. But every man has a social as well as a personal side, and feels that anything which affects the group to which he belongs, the city, the state, the nation,

in fact the whole world, is a matter of importance to him. These two sources of interest determine the appeal of the editorial in general. A particular element that usually increases interest is timeliness. Many men rely upon the editorials in their daily paper to keep them informed on the significant developments of the day. It is natural that anything involving their own community is of special interest. Obviously then, the editorial writer finds much of his material in local matters. Everybody is absorbed in what is happening at the moment, especially with what goes on in his own city.

Therefore in approaching the writing of an editorial you must choose some subject about which your public wishes to hear an opinion. Presumably you are writing for an audience of college students, who are most interested in the problems which arise in connection with their own activities. Perhaps the possibility of building a new stadium or the question of abolishing the honor system is being generally discussed; or a change in the requirements for a degree, or the shortening of the Christmas vacation may have just been announced. Any such matter as this

will so seriously affect the affairs of your readers that if you were the editor of the student daily you could not pass it by. The following topics were treated in the editorials of a university newspaper within the space of one month: Democracy in Education; Limitation of Enrollment; Coeducation; Compulsory Chapel; Straw Hat Day; A Tribute to a Coach; The Duty of an Alumnus; A New Club House; Get on the Band-wagon (Class Endowment); College as a Preparation for Life (from the Inside); A Class Election. It is easy to see that these are all directly connected with student affairs and reflect dominant interests of the undergraduate. Whatever is of moment to your particular group is suitable for editorial discussion.

To write about a wide range of human activities, a man must have extensive knowledge. This knowledge must cover not only events in themselves but also their causes and the general laws they illustrate. History, politics, economics, sociology, natural science, literature,—with all of these a writer of editorials must be sufficiently familiar to illuminate by means of them events of the day. If, for instance, you do not know the

results of efforts in the past to modify the gold basis of currency, you cannot speak with authority about any such change now contemplated. Nothing you study can fail to be of value to you in the writing of the editorial. If, for example, you have been studying the history of socialism, you may find there an illustration which will point a possible discussion of student government; or an allusion to the career of Shelley will perhaps make plain to your reader your attitude on the subject of the non-conformist in college. The more you know, the better equipped you will be.

The value of your knowledge, however, will lie largely in your ability to relate it to contemporary affairs. To establish such a relation, you must be fully alive to what is going on around you, both in your own circle and beyond it. You should, moreover, be in close touch with the public. The editorial writer is not one who sits off by himself and hurls his opinions at other people far away from him. The extent to which he can exert an influence upon others is dependent upon his acquaintance with humanity and his intimacy with that particular portion of it for whom he writes. His editorials are one with the history and ambitions of the community. The aspira-

tions, the disappointments, the hopes, of his readers, are vitally connected with any opinion that he puts forward. You must discover what your associates are thinking and talking about; you must know what their attitude is in regard to the controversial questions which agitate your college. Only by contact with others will you be able to make your opinions worth while.

No special rules govern the composition of an editorial article. It is simply a piece of good exposition, as clear, as orderly, as cogent as its writer can make it. But the limitation of newspaper space usually dictates that the editorial be brief. It is therefore very important from the standpoint of effectiveness that every editorial have only one purpose. The writer must determine before he begins to write what purpose a discussion of the subject he has chosen can best accomplish at the moment. And to that one end he will apply every word he sets down. A condensed explanation of the method by which a class election is to be held, for example, might aim to defend it as the best method of conducting such elections, but the same editorial could not go on to present a very forceful plea against indifference or dishonesty on the part of the voters. The

skilled editor would write another article the following day to achieve this second purpose. A serious criticism of the athletic committee for apparent discrimination against the undergraduates in the matter of football seats would weaken itself if the discussion were allowed to become amusing. When you are seeking to influence your reader, do not muddle him by introducing irrelevant details, however interesting. Relate all the parts of your discussion to the main object. As an editorial writer, you must learn to say one thing at a time.

The trouble with many editorials is that they are not read. Success in winning attention is in part dependent on a writer's manner of presentation. The following editorial, taken from a student daily, discusses a subject which might have been expressed in the sentence, "There is a great deal of difference in the character of the instruction which a student receives in two departments of the university." But the writer does n't put it in just that way:

LITTLE CAPSULES

The scene of our story is laid on the campus of a large university not a stone's throw from this

office. We are in a room, unseen to the human eye by reason of our magic cloak, as the clock strikes the hour. What do we see? Well, before us we observe about thirty small capsules of the kind used by doctors to administer bitter powders. The capsules are in a state of agitation, but on the entrance of a human being with set face and cold, colorless eyes, they subside into inactivity. This individual, whom we suppose to be the scientist about to investigate into the contents of these capsules, takes a place at a table on a raised dais. He has manuscripts with him contained in a folder, which he proceeds to distribute about the surface of the table in an orderly manner.

The silence is broken as the scientist addresses one of the little capsules, which promptly rears itself on end and becomes exceedingly active. The learned man takes this capsule and proceeds to probe its contents in an absolutely unconcerned manner. Apparently he is not satisfied with this cursory observation, and throws the capsule contemptuously aside, taking no notice of its violent efforts to recapture his attention. We are led to believe that the scientist has evidently not determined the true contents of the capsule, for its actions seem to show consternation and disappointment. But he does not again turn his attention to this pitiful little capsule. He is a scientist; he has

graduated from this institution the year previous, and he knows what he sees when he sees it. Just ask him whether this is not so. Of course it is.

And so on for the remainder of the hour, each capsule receiving a few moments of aloof observation. We wonder where, when and how the capsules were filled.

At the start of the next hour we find ourselves in a room in another building. Here are the capsules, but they are empty. What can be the meaning of this? How can the scientist, who we suppose will arrive shortly, carry on his experiment?

We decide to wait and see, and in a few moments are rewarded by the sight of a fat, jovial individual coming down the aisle, speaking to many of the capsules as he passes. He reaches the dais and the capsules become motionless.

He speaks. As we listen, we imagine that the walls of the room have vanished, and we are in a beautiful country. Picturesque figures move before our eyes, colorful action takes place before our wondering gaze. And so on, for the remainder of the hour, we drink in knowledge and we crave more.

Then a gong rings and the speaker becomes silent. The walls return to their proper place. But, lo and behold, the capsules are filled to overflowing.

They leave the room exuding an atmosphere of happiness and contentment.

The editorial is interesting because the author has been at pains to make it so. Its effectiveness is in the satire, the contrasts, the keenness of observation, and the neat turns of phrase which make his irony unmistakable.

But cleverness of presentation will not avail you if you do not possess one other quality, courage. You must have faith in your own convictions. Too many editors have been accused of playing safe, of straddling an issue because they feared to champion a cause. While it is not necessary for you to denounce those who do not agree with you or to accuse others of insincerity or bad faith because their point of view is different from your own, you must have certain standards which you are never afraid to uphold. Honesty of opinion will gain for you the respect of even your opponents. If the readers for whom you write know that your judgment is based on an unwavering adherence to truth, that factional interest or personal timidity cannot deter you from saying what upon careful consideration you believe to be true, they will read your editorials.

The power of the editorial writer puts him in a position of peculiar responsibility; for others who are dependent upon him have reposed in him their confidence. He has thus a trust to the safeguarding of which he must bring all his energy and resolution. Like any one in a public position he may at times find his situation difficult, but the more difficult it becomes, the greater the demand upon him for courage and loyalty.

. . . . . .

There are a good many matters in every college community which in one aspect or another may come up for discussion at any time. The introduction of new courses, changes in the requirements for a degree, the building of additional lecture rooms, or laboratories, or a wing to the library, "cuts," the beautifying of the campus, the eligibility of athletes, are some of these. To deal with such problems intelligently will probably require no exhaustive research into records, or extended examination of statistics. If you feel that there is a real interest among your college associates in matters beyond the limits of the campus, you might try to write an editorial on some problem of city or even national politics. But such subjects as these will be adequately treated

in the newspapers which everybody reads. In a unified college community local matters are of paramount importance, and will give you the best opportunity to say what you honestly think.

THE INTERVIEW

THE interview is a product of modern journalism. Originally it was a device for getting men to say what they would never stop to set down. The men who act are often not men who write. They may have knowledge of things that would be of great interest and profit to the public, may hold opinions that the rest of the world would be glad to hear, may have stored in their memories records of events and recollections of the past that history would be the poorer for losing. The interview conveys these things in a conversational form which will attract people who shy at an essay or formal article. But today the interview has greatly widened its scope. It has become a device to enable the world at large to meet interesting people. It reflects the world's interest in Personality,—an interest so great that it has caused the word to be written often with a capital P. It is natural to want to know what the man who sought the South Pole or the man who wrote the Nick Carter stories was like. These

two ends, to convey information and reveal personality, are entirely compatible. The interviewer in portraying personal character makes his report more vivid and more human at the same time that he makes more intelligible the views and ideas of the person he is picturing for the public.

What kinds of men, then, make good subjects for interviews? First there are the men of universal reputation,—men like Lloyd George, Marconi, Douglas Fairbanks. These men, of course, are outside your reach. Secondly, there are the men who have overcome difficulties, or solved some big problem. Other people are interested in knowing how they did it,—how Mr. Babson, for example, given a few months to live, fought a successful fight against disease and built up one of the greatest statistical organizations of the country; or how Mr. Endicott managed one of the largest shoe factories in the United States for over thirty years without a single strike. There are probably men with equally interesting achievements to their credit in your neighborhood, if you seek them out. Thirdly, there are men who have done *anything* that makes them known, invented something, written a book, gone through some unusual experience, cornered the market, risen from

the ranks, or figured in the news of the day. This class is easily within the reach of many students. Fourthly, there are the men who have special knowledge of some subject and whose opinions are sought after—bankers, specialists in international law, transportation, economic conditions in Europe, science, literature. Every town and every university has a number of men of this type who are accessible to the student. It is really not difficult to find an interesting person to interview.

A man may be interesting to the public, then, for what he is or what he has done, for what he thinks or what he knows. In deciding, therefore, upon the person with whom you will seek an interview, it is necessary at the same time to make up your mind as to the subject on which you will try to get him to talk. If you know his life has been unusual, you might try to get him to tell you his story. If it is his opinion you want, you should be sure that the subject is one on which he will be willing to talk and one which he knows something about. You cannot expect a financier to discuss a matter which it would be to his disadvantage to talk about. And it is ridiculous to think that a single trip across the Atlantic makes

a New England clergyman an authority on political conditions in Russia. Such a discussion would be almost as futile as the typical newspaper man's interview with this or that celebrated British novelist, who, as he steps on the dock in New York, expresses it as his opinion that America is a large country, or that American women are the most beautiful in the world. On the other hand men who have special knowledge of some particular thing, even though the subject is not one of great importance, are often interesting when they talk about the thing they know. And this fact is recognized by editors. A recent issue of a magazine which devotes a considerable part of its space each month to interviews, real or disguised, printed an interview with the president of a cleaning and dyeing establishment. It contained merely some moderately amusing anecdotes of men who clung to old garments for comfort, a few commonplace opinions such as that stenographers were most exacting and rich people easiest to please, and a bit of rather obvious advice as to how to take care of your wearing apparel. Yet it was published by a magazine that makes no secret of its circulation and was doubtless found interesting by many of its readers. A well-known

American newspaper has for several years published an interview a day under the caption "Now My Idea is This." These interviews are acceptable because they are with people who know a little more about some particular subject than the general public does. The moral is obvious: Pick your man, but in addition determine what it was that led you to think him a suitable subject. Make that the point of your conversation and of your finished article.

Having selected a person and decided what you want to ask him, your next problem is to obtain the actual interview. The professional journalist representing an influential periodical has little trouble except occasionally in the case of "big" men with little time and less inclination to be questioned. His real difficulty is in getting them to talk. Interviewers employ different methods, adapting their procedure to the individual. Mr. Isaac Marcosson, who has interviewed a great many prominent men in Great Britain and the United States, speaks in more than one place in his book, *Adventures in Interviewing,* of getting uncommunicative men to talk by beginning the conversation with some other subject than the one he is interested in: "One successful way,"

he says, "to coach a 'non-imparter' into fluency of fact is to start him on some subject remote from the one at hand. This tends to crank up his powers of expression. Before long he unconsciously returns to the thing you really want to talk about and reels off data like a streak." (P. 76.) This he calls a favorite rule of his in interviewing difficult men. "It consists of establishing communication with a topic certain to interest. One thing leads to another and almost before you realize it the talk-waves are in motion." (P. 219.) For the purpose of such conversation it is necessary to have subjects of common interest to talk about. Mr. Marcosson says: "I have invariably made it a point to find out all I could possibly know about a man before I went to see him. . . . Before the war if I knew nothing about a man's particular hobby or interest I made it my business to find out something about it—whether it was horses, yachts, landscape gardening, good roads, first editions, etchings or baseball." Incidentally, what you have already learned about a man you will not need to ask him, thereby saving time and often embarrassment. But for a man who won't be led thus into saying what you want him to say, other methods will sometimes achieve

the desired result. "One almost unfailing argument in favor of an interview with a public man is that it will be of some benefit to the interviewee or aid the cause with which he is allied." (Marcosson, 47.) The resourceful interviewer will find some way of avoiding the necessity of going away without at least something of what he came after.

You must recognize, however, that as a student you do not have the advantages which the professional journalist has in such a situation. Generally your safest plan will be to select for your interview some one you know, or some one whom you can see without an introduction, or some one to whom you can obtain a letter of introduction, possibly from your father or a friend. Getting him to talk should not present any difficulty if you choose for your interview a topic he does not object to discussing. Formulate one or two important questions which you can ask at once. In your case there should be no need to fence, and by offering him immediately a specific subject for discussion you insure the interview against becoming an awkward and embarrassing effort on the part of both persons to carry on a general conversation which in the end leaves you with

little that you can use. Don't fire a long series of questions at his head. It should not be necessary if you are a good listener and have the skill to interpose occasionally an observation or a query that keeps the conversation going in the direction you want it to pursue. And don't, if you can help it, make notes in his presence. Most men become self-conscious or cautious in the presence of a notebook. As a French writer expresses it, "A notebook shuts a man's mouth while it opens his eyes." Try to remember the conversation until you get outside. Finally, when the interview is finished, leave. If your man is worth interviewing, he probably has other things to do.

Let us assume, now, that you have obtained the necessary material and are ready to write it up. The way you begin the report of your interview is very important. In all forms of journalism it is especially necessary to gain the reader's attention at once. If what he has begun is at all interesting he will naturally continue to read it. It is overcoming the initial indifference that is the hardest. Consider then how you can most directly and interestingly open your subject. The more quickly you get off, the better. Here is an example:

I have just left Bill Hart. For hours we have been talking together. Minus chaps and sombrero, mounted on nothing more vicious than a swivel chair, the famous "two-gun man" of the movies has been telling me a drama so human and vivid that those in which I have seen him starred seem drab in contrast. It is the story of his own life.

Another interviewer catches the reader's attention by describing her first meeting with a man who was one of the most talked-of people in New York:

It was Monday, July 5, 1920, when "Lightnin'" was ending its second year on Broadway, that I took my letter of introduction in one hand and my courage in both hands, and went down to the Gaiety Theatre to present myself to Frank Bacon.

I knew that famous stars were not easy to approach, and I feared that I would be told Mr. Bacon was too busy or too tired, or too something or other, to see me.

"Lightnin's" first act was not quite over when I reached the stage door. At the end of the act the doorman waylaid Mr. Bacon as he left the stage and handed him the letter and my card. Mr. Bacon squinted in my direction and told me to follow him. We went into his dressing-room, and Mr. Bacon

nodded toward a chair, and then he sank into an enormous black-leather one beside the make-up shelf.

Sometimes the interviewer begins with a bit of conversation, one of the questions asked; sometimes with a pertinent anecdote, as in the following, which concerns Mr. Albert R. Brunker, the president of a large corporation, who began as a mining engineer:

"Steve" Small possessed a powerful thirst. Two weeks was just about as long as he could go without getting gloriously drunk. He also possessed some practical knowledge of railroad building—not much, but some. In the winter of 1903 these characteristics combined to make him one of the most sought-after men in the state of Arkansas.

When Small approached a peak of thirst, he felt an irresistible call to get as far away from his job as he could. Then he had to be rounded up and brought back. This solicitous search for him was due to the fact that he was the only available man who knew enough to construct a certain narrow gauge railroad which had to be built.

A mining engineer named Brunker, who was only twenty years old and less than six months out of college, used to trail Small on these frequent sprees.

Brunker was in charge of the camp. A combination of circumstances had placed him in this responsible position. And another set of circumstances had forced him, as one of his first jobs, to build a railroad. . . .

One day Brunker missed Small and, suspecting that he was to be found in Little Rock, sixty miles away, set out to get him. A tour of the Little Rock saloons was successful. Small, when located, was hilariously drunk; but Brunker took him by the arm and led him to the railroad station, followed by a group of Small's cronies. After the two men had boarded the train, Small leaned out of the car window and yelled back to these cronies:

"May th' angels protec' *you* fellers! Brunker's lookin' after *me!*"

The incident is made to illustrate a significant trait of Mr. Brunker's character, one which the interviewer felt was responsible for some of his unusual success. There are still other ways of beginning your account. But these will perhaps serve as illustrations of how you may gain your reader's interest.

However you begin your article, you must contrive early in the story to tell who your man is and what he has done that makes him unusual.

Somewhere in the back of your reader's mind there are always the questions: Who *is* he? And why should I read about an interview with *him?* Of course it goes without saying that you must give his name. "An Interview with Mr. ——" will never be read. Only in exceptional cases will any other form of identification be acceptable. "One of the members of the President's cabinet" or "one of the directors of the Bethlehem Steel Company" will do where the information given is of a confidential character or such that the person interviewed must not be quoted by name. But the interest in such interviews will be in the facts and opinions, not in the personality of the man from whom they come. In all other cases you must tell the reader his name and who he is. Even in the case of well-known people, some explanation is desirable, conveyed in such a way that you do not insult the reader's intelligence if he already happens to have the information. One of the most experienced interviewers in America gives the advice, "In interviewing, an iron-clad rule is to *explain* everything." In the interview quoted above, with even so well-known a figure as Bill Hart, the writer explains in the second paragraph:

> To-day Hart is one of the greatest drawing cards in the motion-picture field. Every twenty-four hours he is seen on the screen by six million people. In the course of a year, he passes in review before a greater number of human beings, measured in terms of paid admissions, than make up the population of the entire world.
>
> He entered the motion-picture field in 1914. . . .

All this means simply that in the interview, as in life, people like to know whom they are talking to.

These things—securing an effective opening and "placing" the person concerned in your interview—are in the nature of preliminary matter. You now come to the body of your story. There are so many things that you can do in an interview that there is a tendency to try to do them all. This leads to rambling and to a distribution of the emphasis so that you leave your reader with no single sharp impression. It is better to concentrate upon one aspect of a man's character, or opinions, or achievements, and relate everything to it. For example: When Roosevelt was known to be taking lessons in the Japanese system of self-defense, a newspaper man realizing that here was a new incident in his life, engaged him in conversation on the subject, got some in-

teresting views and experiences from him, went away and looked up jiu jitsu, and as a result wrote an interview describing this latest of Roosevelt's interests, what it was, who his teacher was, and when he took a lesson. The interviewer drew an interesting picture (probably from his imagination) of one of these periods of instruction, and made the whole thing illustrate Roosevelt's tremendous energy, dynamic personality, interest in every manly exercise, and enthusiasm for anything that made a man better able to take care of himself in any situation. This is a good illustration of an interview in which everything is directed to revealing and illuminating *one* big quality of the man interviewed. It would not be too much to say that as a result the interview has a genuinely artistic unity.

Above all make your story interesting, readable. Try to "dramatize" your material,—that is, present it vividly with those little hints of action and setting, those little realistic touches that will cause the reader to lose himself in your account, forget that he is reading about the man, and for the moment come to believe himself actually present in the room, participating in the conversation, sharing in the man's acquaintance.

Sometimes the story of a man's life and the character of his opinions are sufficient in themselves to interest the reader. At other times the account would become monotonous if unrelieved by something that will re-create the scene and bring the reader back into the picture. For instance, in the article on Bill Hart the interviewer realized that the narrative, though interesting, was going along too steadily in the one key. So he broke it by this incident:

> . . . In the course of our talk the Westerner chanced to glance through the window to the yard below. Some men were leading Fritz (his famous pony) into a cart, in which he was to be whisked behind a motor truck to Hart's ranch outside of Hollywood.
>
> The interview went into immediate recess. As nervously as a mother watching her first-born, Hart followed every movement in the yard. I asked him a question, but he did not hear me. When the truck started away he leaned from the window and called:
>
> "Good-by, Fritz! Good-by, old man!"
>
> The pony arched his neck and tossed his head in farewell. Hart followed the rig out of sight.
>
> "Maybe you think I 'm dotty about Fritz," he

said, grinning boyishly as he turned around; "but if anything happened to that horse it would come close to ditching me, too. . . ."

The reader is back in the room and the narrative can proceed for a while longer.

Finally it is necessary to say a word about the tone of your article. It should be courteous and fair. You should not be ashamed to meet the man you have interviewed afterwards. Especially, avoid the worst fault of American interviewing, happily becoming rarer in these days of enlightened journalism. That is a certain rowdyism of spirit that some writers mistake for vitality. G. K. Chesterton describes it well:

> . . . A very quiet and intelligent young man, in a soft black hat and tortoise-shell spectacles, will ask for an interview with unimpeachable politeness, wait for his living subject with unimpeachable patience, talk to him quite sensibly for twenty minutes and go noiselessly away. Then in the newspaper next morning you will read how he beat the bedroom door in, and pursued his victim on to the roof or dragged him from under the bed, and tore from him replies to all sorts of bald and ruthless questions printed in large black letters. I was often interviewed in the evening, and had no notion of how

> atrociously I had been insulted till I saw it in the paper next morning. I had no notion I had been on the rack of an inquisitor until I saw it in plain print. . . . An interesting essay might be written upon points on which nations affect more vices than they possess; and it might deal more fully with the American pressman, who is a harmless clubman in private, and becomes a sort of highway-robber in print.[1]

Conditions have changed since the Civil War days, when the interview originated. It is no longer conceived of as a duel between an interviewer and a man who did not want to talk. The object of the interview is not to show how the interviewer scored a personal triumph, but to report faithfully and interestingly a conversation with a man who has some claim to be heard.

[1] G. K. Chesterton, *What I Saw in America*. New York (Dodd, Mead & Co.), 1922, pp. 60–61. Quoted by permission.

INFORMAL ARGUMENT

ARGUMENT is any form of speaking or writing in which by a process of reasoning you attempt to prove the truth or falsity of an assertion, change a person's opinion, or influence his action. It may assume the elaborateness and formality of a debate or it may be as casual and informal as conversation. The debate is a special form with its own conventions and requirements. But the informal argument has many varieties. It may be your attempt to persuade a friend that he should come to college, or the salesman's effort to convince you that you need more insurance. It may be the report of an engineer trying to prove to a board of directors the desirability of an additional unit for their factory, or it may be one of the many magazine articles in which the author seeks to gain public acceptance for his views on some political, social, or economic question. Although much that we shall have to say here applies with equal force to the debate, our concern will be chiefly with argument of this sec-

ond and more general type and the means by which its ends are achieved.

Theoretically all matters of proof fall under the head of argument. A proposition in geometry, for example, may be so classed. In actual practice, however, it is better to treat such pieces of scientific demonstration as exposition and to confine argument to questions which admit of a reasonable difference of opinion, are open to more than one interpretation, or can be looked at from more than one point of view. Yet not all questions to which there are two sides are profitable subjects for argument. You cannot expect universal agreement on questions such as whether golf or tennis is the better game, or whether blondes or brunettes make the better wives. Our conclusions about such matters are so little dependent upon reason that it is useless to discuss them. In like manner questions which involve emotions such as faith or love, seldom lend themselves to argument. It is useless for most people to argue about the relative merits of their respective colleges or matters of religious belief. And it may be added that theories that contradict the average person's experience, such as those advanced by spiritists, are difficult to prove or dis-

prove because of the insufficiency of trustworthy evidence.

The argument is a form of literature valuable not for itself but for what it can accomplish. Your reader will be interested in it only if it concerns a subject that he is or could be interested in. It is desirable, then, to try to gain his attention at the beginning by showing him why the question is significant and if possible how it touches him personally. If the subject to be discussed has any practical or universal bearings this should not be difficult to do.

The next thing you must do is to make sure that he understands just what the question under discussion is. The only way to do this is to state the proposition in the form of a simple assertion in words which admit of as little vagueness of interpretation as possible. You cannot prove "Prohibition," "The Income Tax," or "The Standing Army." You might try to prove that prohibition is or is not desirable, that the income tax should be reduced, or that the United States should maintain a larger standing army. If the proposition you wish to maintain or overthrow contains terms which different people might understand in different ways, you must explain what you intend them

to mean in your discussion. If you contend that the tax on moderate-sized incomes should be substantially reduced, you must tell what you mean by "moderate-sized" and "substantially," whether by the former you mean incomes under five thousand dollars or up to ten or fifteen, and secondly, whether you consider ten or fifty per cent a substantial reduction. Otherwise different people, according to their own incomes and their own ideas of tax reduction, will interpret these terms in different ways. Many times people argue at cross purposes when they are really of one opinion, simply because they are using the same words in different senses. In an informal argument it is as necessary as in a formal debate to state the proposition you mean to prove or disprove and to define your terms. The difference is that you are at special pains to do these things in a pleasant and informal way.

It is possible by reading and thinking to find many arguments in support of almost any proposition, many more than it is well to use. What counts is not the number of points you can urge, but their importance. It is a human instinct to want to get at the bottom of a problem and to determine what considerations in the last analysis

its solution depends upon. It is advisable, therefore, to sift and weigh your arguments, to test their validity. Select from those that you keep the few points of outstanding importance and build your proof around these.

And now you must decide upon the order in which you will present your arguments. The arrangement you are most likely to adopt is the order of increasing importance. The order of increasing importance is based upon the principle that the more recent an impression, other things being equal, the fresher it is in mind. In any series of arguments, therefore, while the earlier points are likely to be driven into the background by subsequent discussion, those coming at the end are still fresh in the reader's mind when he finishes reading. You select then those points which you want him to think about most and put them at the end, arranging the rest so that they lead up to these final important considerations. Theoretically the order of increasing importance implies that you begin with the weakest of your arguments and pass by degrees to the strongest. Practically this is not desirable. It is necessary to begin well, to impress your reader with the force of what you are going to say. So instead of

beginning with the least important of your points, you select a fairly strong argument or one that you think will make a sympathetic appeal to your reader. Then you are free to proceed according to the relative value of your remaining points. Some of your arguments, you may feel, are open to apparent refutation and you may anticipate certain objections likely to be urged by one holding different views. Vital objections cannot be ignored, nor can they be met by talking about other points. It is well to recognize the arguments on the other side and briefly to answer them either early in your discussion or singly as they arise in connection with your own contentions.

In the pursuit of your plan clarity is so essential that any device by which you can aid the reader in following your thought helps you, if your points are well taken, to convince him. Of the mechanical aids that you can employ proper paragraphing is one of the most important. From the point of view of argument much the most useful conception of the paragraph is that of "a group of sentences *proving* some statement."[1] The statement to be proved forms the

[1] This is a very useful conception of the paragraph in other forms of writing as well, and the student who has difficulty in mastering the structure of the paragraph would do well to con-

topic sentence of the paragraph. Generally it is the opening sentence, but it may at times be anywhere in the paragraph, even at the end. Space does not permit here a discussion of the various methods of paragraph development. The important consideration is that each paragraph be the clear discussion of one clearly stated topic idea. If your paragraphs fulfil this requirement you will be able to summarize your argument by recapitulating your topic sentences.

In the proof of your points you are concerned first of all with what is called evidence. People who believe strongly in a thing are likely to confuse assertion with proof. But assertion is merely unsupported opinion; proof is that which convinces the mind. Opinion may at times be evidence; but if it is to be convincing it must be the opinion of an authority. It betrays an uncritical mind to cite as evidence the opinions of unknown editorial writers or of some obscure author of a magazine article. If the authority is of sufficient prominence to be well recognized by the reader, his name will be sufficient to gain consideration for his opinion. If he is not prominent he

sult an excellent little book by Miss Helen Thomas, called *A Study of the Paragraph*, New York (1912).

should be properly introduced. Mere prominence, however, is not sufficient. In arguing from authority it is necessary that the person whose views you cite shall have special knowledge of the subject under discussion. The opinion of the moving picture star who in an advertisement recommends a particular brand of tooth paste does not carry much conviction. Moreover, if your authority is to be convincing, he must be unprejudiced. The opinions of a man who is known to be committed to one side of a question, though it is universally agreed that he knows what he is talking about, are certain to be discounted. When all is said, the argument from authority is seldom wholly satisfactory. Its weakness lies in the fact that the reader, in accepting the opinion of your authority, never attains so strong a conviction as that which you can lead him to arrive at for himself.

Much better than authority is the evidence of fact and inference. Such evidence is usually divided into *testimonial* and *circumstantial*. If a witness saw one automobile run into another, his evidence is testimonial; if the owner comes up and finds his fender bent, the damaged fender is circumstantial evidence that his car has been run

into. It is obvious that testimonial evidence depends merely upon the competence and truthfulness of the witness and is tested by its plausibility and its consistency with other known facts. But circumstantial evidence always involves an inference and the inference may be incorrect. Thus in the illustration given the owner's inference that he has been run into is probably correct, but not necessarily so. An urchin may have struck his fender with a base-ball bat, or, if the damage is slight, it may have been caused unconsciously by the owner himself, while he was driving out of his garage. In argument circumstantial evidence necessarily plays a large part and you will readily see how important it is that your reasoning from it be sound.

Reasoning has been defined as the process by which conclusions are inferred from known facts. When from a number of observations you conclude that automobiles tend to skid on a wet street you have inferred a general truth from a number of particular instances of it and you are said to reason *inductively;* when from such a general truth you conclude that *your* automobile is liable to skid on a wet street, you act on the principle that "whatever is affirmed of a class may be af-

firmed of all members of that class" and you are said to reason *deductively*. Reasoning is a mechanical process, but since it is performed by human beings the possibility of error is always present.

In *deductive* reasoning the danger is that your conclusion may not follow from your premises. If you hear some one argue (1) that only college students are elected to Phi Beta Kappa; (2) that Smith is a college student; and (3) that therefore Smith will be elected to Phi Beta Kappa, you immediately object to the conclusion. You may have difficulty in explaining what is wrong with this and other examples of fallacious deduction, but you can generally detect them. It is the same with the process of inductive reasoning, which may take three main forms. The first is simple generalization, previously illustrated. In this case you may arrive at a wrong conclusion either through faulty observation or by generalizing from an insufficient number of cases. The second is reasoning by analogy, as when you reason that since your friend gained weight by drinking milk, you can do so too. Your inference in this case may prove correct, but reasoning by analogy always involves the danger of comparing things that

only imperfectly resemble each other. The third form of inductive reasoning is concerned directly with the causal relation. In it you may argue from effect back to cause, from cause to its probable effect, or from effect to effect. When you can't get to sleep at night you may attribute your wakefulness to what you ate before going to bed; you are reasoning from effect to cause. If you drink two cups of coffee because you want to keep awake, you do so because you have reasoned from a cause to its probable effect. If you reason from the sound of rain on the roof that your parched lawn is being watered, you are reasoning from effect to effect. The average person is most likely to go wrong in inferences of this type by assuming a causal relation to exist where in reality it does not. A woman goes to a doctor for some imaginary ailment; he gives her some sugar pills; the next day she is feeling much better and attributes her recovery to the pills. Coincidence is mistaken for cause. There are other ways of falling into errors of thinking, such as arguing from an unjustified assumption or failing to meet squarely an issue. A more extended discussion of the reasoning process and its pitfalls will be found in any elementary book on logic. But you can construct

a sound argument without knowing the formal classifications which the logicians have worked out. It will be sufficient if you recognize and avoid the common mistakes you are liable to make and that occur in the discussions of other men.

Not all of your ability to convince depends upon argument. Often explanation can be made to play an important part. No man is likely to arrive at a very strong conviction concerning something he does not understand. Whatever success you may have in getting him on your side of the question will be as a result of his confidence in your judgment. But if you explain the situation to him so that he feels competent to judge for himself the worth of your arguments, his conviction will be much more firm. Suppose as a business man you advocate the merging of three steel companies. The best way to have your plan adopted is to explain fully the terms of the merger, possibly compare the plan with that followed in some similar consolidation, outline the equitable provisions it contains for each of the present companies, and show how economies will be effected that will result in increased earnings. Such an explanation comes near to carrying its own conviction.

Most of this chapter has been devoted to the logical aspects of argument. Yet something must be said for the psychological factors that enter into good argumentative writing. Man is not a logical machine deciding questions on a mathematical basis, but a human being full of sympathies and prejudices and concealed motives. To appeal to these has always been one of the devices of persuasion. The average man is moderate and will often be sympathetic to moderation whereas he would recoil from extremes. He respects fairness. Avoid, then, overstating your case or giving the impression that you have lost your perspective and are incapable of seeing more than your side of the question. Your reader will have greater confidence in your judgment if he feels that you have weighed both sides and arrived at a considered opinion. Don't exaggerate the possible disagreement with your reader, and beware of letting your enthusiasm lead you into misstatements of fact. Again, the average man likes modesty and tact as much as he dislikes overconfidence and assertiveness. It is with this in mind that Franklin in his *Autobiography* explains: "I made it a rule to forbear all direct contradiction to the sentiments of others, and all

positive assertion of my own. I even forbid myself . . . the use of every word or expression in the language that imported a fix'd opinion, such as *certainly, undoubtedly,* etc., and I adopted, instead of them, *I conceive, I apprehend,* or *I imagine* a thing to be so or so; or it *so appears to me at present.*" Finally, the average reader dislikes a belligerent tone or any bitterness or loss of temper. So be courteous and good-humored. In a word, try to conduct your argument—especially an informal argument—in the spirit that characterizes a conversation between gentlemen.

THE BUSINESS LETTER

THE business letter has been defined as a potential contract. We often say to a man: "Write us a letter and we will consider your proposition." We say this because in such a form a proposal may be considered as a whole and because the letter becomes a permanent record which may be filed and referred to later. The business letter has to do with the serious affairs of life as distinguished from social activities and diversions. In a word, it is generally concerned with the making or the expenditure of money. It may be very short, a simple acknowledgment in a single sentence of an obligation discharged; or it may be a long and elaborate explanation or report. In any case it must fulfil certain requirements if it is to achieve its purpose.

First, it must be orderly. In social correspondence we get into the habit of thinking that since a letter between friends is read and thrown away and forgotten, it is not necessary to spend much time on its composition. So too often we write it

without forethought, as the ideas come to us. Unfortunately the practice results not merely in poorly arranged social letters, but in our writing all letters in the same off-hand way. A good business letter, however, is not a casual matter. While in actual practice you cannot stop to outline each letter, you can get clearly in mind the points to be included and the order in which they should stand. You can also decide on the division into paragraphs. In the business letter it is as essential as in any other form of writing that your ideas be grouped and arranged in a logical sequence.

Since the business letter is exclusively a useful form of writing, clearness and completeness in treating the matter in hand are indispensable. Clearness, although in part it concerns expression, to some extent depends upon completeness. No letter can be complete in which details calling for mention are omitted. The omission is likely to result from the failure of the writer to apprehend fully what the problem involves, i. e. failure to realize what the reader will want to know and expect to learn from his letter. In other cases the writer assumes that the details entering into a transaction are clear or fresh in the reader's

mind, whereas the latter may be occupied at the same time with many other equally important matters. Sometimes he fails to bear in mind that the business letter is not only a communication but a record, and that it must be understandable often after a considerable time has elapsed. In still other cases omissions are the result of excessive brevity. Conciseness is a virtue in business correspondence, so long as it is consistent with completeness and courtesy. Conciseness is to be obtained, however, by adhering to that one purpose for which the letter is written and eliminating everything that is not essential to it. You may test the completeness and clarity of your letter by asking whether it says in unambiguous words what the reader needs to be told.

So far as clearness depends upon the way a thing is said, it suggests another essential element of the business letter,—correct and effective expression. There is a common and fundamental misconception among a certain class of business men, and some teachers in commercial schools, that "business English" is so different from ordinary speech and writing as to be almost a separate language. It must be admitted that in the past there was some reason for such an impres-

sion. Before the days of stenographers and typewriters letters were often couched in a kind of shorthand made up of abbreviations and stock phrases, with the omission of essential words, a style that to-day is considered not only ineffective but discourteous. Such false economy is now discouraged by all large corporations. Certain faulty expressions are both trite and useless. "Yours of the 5th inst. received and contents noted" and "With renewed assurance of our good will, we beg to remain" are wasteful of the recipient's time and patience. The latter should be omitted and the former could be simply changed to "I have your letter of June 5." Nowadays, with the spread of education, and culture, among the great mass of Americans the practice has grown up of writing business letters in precisely the kind of English that we use in all of the common relations of life. Do not feel, therefore, that in writing a business letter you are called upon to write English of any special kind, for "business English" is just good English. And whatever skill you have acquired in writing of any kind will be of value to you in expressing yourself in a letter.

Still another essential of a good business letter

is courtesy. Courtesy requires that at all times you consider the feelings of the person you are addressing and realize the effect which your letter will have upon him. You must not, in trying to be direct, be blunt; and you must not make your letter so short as to be curt. It is best, too, not to command the recipient. "Pack the goods well and return them to us" would be much more courteous for the little word "please." It is especially necessary to be courteous on those occasions when to be so is hardest,—when, for instance, you reply to a letter that is insolent or unfair. It is easy to say in writing things that you would not say in person. In such a situation it is better to postpone writing the letter until your vexation has cooled; then you will be able tactfully to show how your correspondent is mistaken or unreasonable. If you are writing as the representative of a company, you owe it to your firm to be courteous in your correspondence at all times. And in any case you owe it to yourself.

Most business letters are written to initiate, carry on, or complete a transaction that will be of advantage to the writer. Therefore it is necessary for his letter to *impress* the reader. You must reckon with certain differences of mood and

circumstances that will tend to create barriers between you and the person you are writing to. Personal worries, annoyances that have just preceded the receipt of your letter, a bad cold,—such things may make the one whom you are addressing indifferent, if not hostile, to you and the subject you are writing about. If your letter is not only courteous but written in such a way that it will appeal to the reader's own interest, it will have a better chance of attaining its desired end. The art of interesting the reader has been more highly developed in the sales letter than in other forms of business correspondence; but as one of the largest corporations in America has pointed out in its official directions to those who write its letters, every business letter is in a sense a sales letter, for it promotes the good will of the recipient toward the sender.

We have been speaking of the qualities of a good letter largely in the abstract. Perhaps an illustration or two will make the discussion more clear. In the following letter consider how many of the qualities which we have insisted upon are absent. The faults of the letter are too numerous to point out all of them. Notice, however, how lacking it

is in any plan or orderly sequence of ideas, and how much you want to know that is not told; notice the abbreviations and the jargon, the incomplete sentences and the scrappy paragraphs, the exaggeration that suggests bad taste if not bad business practice, and the general lack of courtesy and tact.

MOUNTAIN VIEW, N. Y.,
April 16, 19—.

RICHARD ROE, ESQ.
110 WEST ST.,
NEWTOWN, N. Y.

DEAR SIR:—

Yours of the 12th inst. rec'd and contents duly noted. In reply to same would say I will be pleased to accommodate you if I can.

Terms for a cottage $1800 for the season, June to September. Meals included but not for more than five persons.

Every one who has ever been here has said what a fine place "The Hemlocks" is. The air is balmy and it is never hot. "Here all nature seems to smile."

Our cottages are heated so that on cool days the guests have all the comforts of home. One of them

is still open. Last year our house was full the entire season, and all of our many guests agreed that we gave them the best of service.

Trusting to hear from you on this proposition at your earliest convenience, as many other inquiries are coming in, and looking forward to seeing you at "The Hemlocks," we beg to remain,

Yours very truly,

JOHN DOE, MGR.

The above letter is so bad that it would be useless to correct it. The following, however, will suggest a form in which it might have been written. It will repay you to compare this with the original, both in detail and in plan. Notice, among other things, how specific the information is, how the description of the cottage is applied to the prospective guest's needs, and how a tone of dignity and courtesy is preserved throughout.

MOUNTAIN VIEW, N. Y.,
April 16, 19—

MR. RICHARD ROE,
110 WEST STREET,
NEWTOWN, N. Y.

DEAR SIR:

I have your letter of April 12, in which you inquire about "The Hemlocks," and what accom-

modations we can offer you and your family of four for the coming season. I shall be pleased if I can provide for your satisfactory entertainment.

"The Hemlocks" has an unusually fortunate location, commanding a view of great beauty. Many of our patrons come from season to season, a fact that indicates the fascination the place has for them.

We have a few cottages in connection with the hotel, one of which is still available. It contains three bedrooms, a bathroom, and a large living room. There is a fireplace in the living room, and the entire cottage has a system of hot-water heating, which is occasionally desirable in the cool days that sometimes come in the early and latter part of the season. Over one hundred feet of porch extend around three of its sides.

The terms are $1800 for the season, which runs from June 16 to September 20. This price includes meals in the hotel dining-room for five persons, and complete service by bell-boys, maids, and all other employees. The arrangement is ideal, as it provides complete privacy when it is desired and at the same time does away with all consideration of meals and other details of housekeeping.

Please let me hear from you at once if you are interested, as others have been making inquiries

and the cottage may be engaged at any moment. I hope to have the pleasure of entertaining you.

Very truly yours,

JOHN DOE

Manager.

It is easy to see what different impressions of the hotel these two letters create. If, as often happens, a letter were the sole basis on which a prospective patron could make his decision, there is no question which of these would have a better chance of success. A business letter is in the nature of a personal representative, and the writer or his firm will inevitably be judged by it. Therefore you cannot overestimate the importance of making your letter the best possible expression of yourself.

. . . . . .

For practice in the business letter numerous situations will suggest themselves which would have to be dealt with by correspondence. When you are graduated from college you will probably be looking for a job. You might write a letter seeking an opening in a corporation, telling what is necessary about yourself and your qualifications, and why you want to join that particular

organization. You may have occasion in college to make arrangements for an athletic contest with another college; or to try to establish relations with an institution not previously on your schedule; or to decline the offer of a game in such a way as to cause no ill feeling. If you enter the business world, you will from time to time be called upon to write letters of recommendation. You might here try writing two or three such letters, —one in which you endorse a man to the fullest extent; another in which you wish to be generally pleasant without approving the person too strongly; and a third in which you decline to recommend him at all, though you are careful to be fair. Any situation requiring judgment and tact will furnish an opportunity to test your skill in the business letter.

THE AFTER-DINNER SPEECH

EVERY college man must recognize the possibility of his being called upon at some time to "say a few words" at a banquet or formal dinner and should give some thought as to how he will most acceptably fulfil his obligation. "There is but one pleasure in life," said Charles Dudley Warner, "equal to that of being called on to make an after-dinner speech, and that is not being called on." Making such a speech is a difficult thing to do gracefully and those who do it best have acquired their skill generally through much practice. Yet it is an age-old custom to conclude a dinner with entertainment, a custom as much in vogue today as was ever minstrel diversion in baronial castle. In America we have cultivated the lighter side in our after-dinner speeches whereas the Englishman has tended in the direction of more serious addresses. Americans have seemingly recognized that after an elaborate dinner is a poor time to exercise the mind too strenuously and that laughter is a better aid to digestion. To an Eng-

lishman there is truth as well as wit in Arnold Bennett's statement that the speech-making "begins with a meal, because it would be impossible on an empty stomach."

Few men think so readily upon their feet or are so blessed with a lively and spontaneous wit that they can attempt an after-dinner speech without previous preparation. The successful speaker is often at great pains to make his speech appear impromptu, but even so celebrated an after-dinner speaker as Mark Twain, his biographer tells us, in the beginning "carefully wrote out his speeches, learned them by heart, and practised them in the seclusion of his chamber." In fact he has himself commented wittily on the subject:

> They [successful after-dinner speakers] have learned their art by long observation and slowly compacted experience; so now they know what they did not know at first, that the best and most telling speech is not the actual impromptu one, but the counterfeit of it; they know that that speech is most worth listening to which has been carefully prepared in private and tried on a plaster cast, or an empty chair, or any other appreciative object that will keep quiet until the speaker has got his matter and his delivery limbered up so that they will seem

impromptu to an audience. The expert knows that. . . . He also leaves blanks here and there—leaves them where genuine impromptu remarks can be dropped in, of a sort that will add to the natural aspect of the speech without breaking its line of march. At the banquet he listens to the other speakers, invents happy turns upon remarks of theirs, and sticks these happy turns into his blanks for impromptu use by and by when he shall be called up . . . And that man will soar along in the most beautiful way, on the wings of a practised memory, heaving in a little decayed grammar here, and a little wise tautology there, and a little neatly counterfeited embarrassment yonder, and a little finely acted stumbling and stammering for a word, rejecting this word and that, and finally getting the right one, and fetching it out with ripping effect, and with the glad look of a man who has got out of a bad hobble entirely by accident—and would n't take a hundred dollars down for that accident; and every now and then he will sprinkle you in one of those happy turns on something that has previously been said; and at last, with supreme art, he will catch himself, when in the very act of sitting down, and lean over the table and fire a parting rocket, in the way of an afterthought, which makes everybody stretch his mouth as it goes up, and dims the very stars in heaven when it explodes.

> And yet that man has been practising that after-thought and that attitude for about a week.[1]

If, therefore, you would make a successful speech at the banquet rather than on the way home after it is all over, you should prepare your words carefully in advance, and if you do not actually memorize them, fix firmly in mind the things you are going to say.

In writing an after-dinner speech the first question you must consider is: How shall I begin? And to this question the only answer is: As simply and naturally as possible. There is no set formula. A graceful compliment to the audience, an appropriate anecdote, a statement of what the toastmaster has asked you to talk about, a reference to a remark of some previous speaker that furnishes an opening,—any of these leads will serve admirably. The one thing essential is that whatever you say shall be said pleasantly and in a spirit of good feeling. In a speech of any kind, you must first win your audience and inspire by the friendliness of your own attitude a similar friendly spirit in your hearers. What you say

[1] *Mark Twain's Speeches*, New York (Harpers), 1923, pp. 2–4. This and the passage on pp. 96–97 are quoted by permission of the Trustees of the Estate of Samuel L. Clemens, the Mark Twain Company, and Harper & Brothers.

next will depend somewhat on the kind of speech you are going to make.

After-dinner speeches are of many kinds, and almost every kind can be illustrated from the speeches of those who have distinguished themselves in this subtle art. There are those in which the speaker seems to have no more definite aim than to tell in rapid succession a series of anecdotes or amusing stories linked together with sufficiently plausible excuses for telling them. If the stories are new and well told, such speeches have the effect of producing merriment without taxing the attention of the audience. And in so far as they are conducive to relaxation they fulfil one of the purposes of the after-dinner speech. But there are those who feel that "intelligent men are not satisfied with mere humor: they like to feel when they go home that they have been in good intellectual company." A somewhat better plan, therefore, is to have something serious to say, something that grows out of the occasion and will be interesting to those present.

For the body of your speech, therefore, decide first upon the subject that you will talk about. It is always possible with a little thought to find some topic that will be appropriate to the circum-

stances that have called forth the dinner. Only a few things are to be avoided, such as one's own achievements or topics on which the sentiments of the audience may be divided. A speaker at a fraternity banquet might, for example, fittingly leave with his audience a thought of the advantages of membership and point his anecdotes and his remarks to this end. Speakers on other occasions will find equally appropriate themes: a football coach might talk on sportsmanship in defeat, or on the spirit that won't be beaten; a sales-manager might address his sales force on faith in one's firm, or the importance of courage, of cheerfulness, or of self-cultivation to success; and so on and on. The important thing is that you really have something to say. Mr. Dooley's ironical comment on the windy but empty speaker is more than merely amusing: "Whin a man has somethin' to say an' don't know how to say it, he says it pretty well. Whin he has somethin' to say an' knows how to say it he makes a gr-reat speech. But whin he has nawthin' to say an' has a lot iv wurruds that come with a black coat, he's an orator." This form of oratory has no place in an after-dinner speech. The advantage of constructing your speech around a definite idea is that it

gives such a speech a unity that the anecdotal type can never attain. Judge Hoar, Professor Matthews reports, delighted Harvard audiences year after year with speeches that contained in each case "but one original idea, clearly stated, and but one fresh story, well told." Not every one is capable of such restraint in the matter of stories, but there can be but little question that the best after-dinner speech, with all its amusing embellishment, is one built around a worthwhile idea.

It should be remembered that an occasion when after-dinner speeches are in order is not one for preaching or too great seriousness. The spirit is one of geniality and good-fellowship. While the guests who are present are not averse to stimulating thought and quickening observations, they have assembled in a spirit of sociability, have dined well, and are in a mood for entertainment. Consequently you should be careful to lighten your discourse and relieve the seriousness of what you may have to say by whatever means you possess for creating amusement. Of these the one most likely to occur to you will be the humorous story. Nothing will more quickly arouse an audience whose attention is beginning to lag. But if your story is to produce the effect you aim at, it

must meet certain requirements. It must be new, one that you can feel reasonably sure the audience has not already heard. It must be appropriate, must grow out of your subject, must not appear to be dragged in by main force. And it must be well told. Write it carefully and fix it well in mind, for when you come to it in speaking you must not stumble, must not forget the point or omit essential details, so that at the end you have to admit lamely, "I forgot to say that . . ." etc. There are some men in whose hands (to quote Sheridan) a joke is no laughing matter. But a good story, well told at an opportune moment, has saved many a speaker's reputation. And if it provides a felicitous illustration it has fully justified its existence. There is nothing undignified about the right kind of story. A profound truth may be said in jest. Besides, a really pertinent story will often impress an idea on the hearer's mind more permanently than sober reason. As Mark Twain says, "There is this advantage about a story, anyway, that whatever moral or valuable thing you put into a speech, why, it gets diffused among those involuted sentences and possibly your audience goes away without finding out what that valuable thing was that you were trying to confer upon it; but,

dear me, you put the same jewel into a story and it becomes the keystone of that story, and you are bound to get it—it flashes, it flames, it is the jewel in the toad's head—you don't overlook that."

The anecdote is only one means of enlivening the after-dinner speech. It is the commonest because it is the means most generally within the powers of the average speaker. But there are other more subtle ways of causing the desired amusement. They do not admit of easy explanation, but he who has the gift of paradox, of humorous exaggeration or whimsical understatement, will need only to be reminded how magical are their effects. In one of Mark Twain's most famous speeches, that delivered on his seventieth birthday, there is not a single resort to "that reminds me"; yet it is one of the most mirthful of his attempts. He explains the course he has followed in life to reach the age of seventy. Among other things he says:

> I have made it a rule never to smoke more than one cigar at a time. I have no other restriction as regards smoking. I do not know just when I began to smoke, I only know that it was in my father's lifetime, and that I was discreet. He passed from this life early in 1847, when I was a shade past eleven; ever since then I have smoked

> publicly. As an example to others, and not that I care for moderation myself, it has always been my rule never to smoke when asleep, and never to refrain when awake. It is a good rule. I mean, for me; but some of you know quite well that it would n't answer for everybody that 's trying to get to be seventy. . . .

The humor of an after-dinner speech does not have to produce a laugh. The inward smile that may not even result in a change of features is just as welcome.

And now for a few practical suggestions which will be of use in the writing of your after-dinner speech. First, don't try to be funny if you can't. Humor, to be sure, is so generally a part of the after-dinner speech that it is difficult to think of one in which this quality is wholly absent. Yet not every man can be witty, or spontaneously diverting, or whimsically allusive. There are some men in whose make-up the gift of humor has seemingly been left out. They may appreciate wit in others. They may laugh whole-heartedly at a funny story told by some one else; but if they try to tell one themselves they generally end by spoiling it. They should not try, at least in public. Perhaps some will say they should not try to make

an after-dinner speech. But this is going too far. You need not feel that you cannot put together an acceptable after-dinner speech because humor does not come within your range. There have been eminently successful after-dinner speeches which did not profess to be humorous. While they did not create a spirit of amusement, they at least did not weary the audience. Sincerity and enthusiasm are fair substitutes for wit and humor, especially if the speech be not too long. But who of us will admit without a trial that he is incapable of humor?

In the second place, try to avoid as completely as possible saying the things that hundreds of other after-dinner speakers have said before. In particular, avoid those trite and hackneyed opening remarks which, however good when new, have long since been dulled by repetition. The speaker who begins with "Unaccustomed as I am to public speaking" or that cheap and oft-repeated comparison of a good speech to a woman's skirt, is making only too plain to his audience the limitations of his mind, to say nothing of his taste. But it is only less objectionable to purvey to a helpless audience age-old platitudes, expressed in phrases worn smooth by use. Mr. Simeon Strunsky, in

an entertaining essay [1] satirizes such speeches in the following paragraphs:

> The Minister of Extraneous Affairs began by saying that the occasion was an historic one. All sources of misunderstanding and irritation between two great peoples had been removed, and in the absence of unforeseen interruptions the two Governments would co-operate in the work of civilization. At this juncture the speaker was irresistibly reminded of the story of the Irishman and his goat, who were crossing a river in a flat-bottomed skiff, and one of them—presumably the Irishman—made a remark which neither I nor my neighbor from the Siamese Embassy quite caught. The rest of the speech was couched in a serious vein, but when it was over, candor compels me to say that my intellectual appetite still bothered me.
>
> The next speaker was the Ambassador from Tegucigalpa. He made me think of a volume I had recently picked up on the Principal Censor's table. It was called "Fifteen Thousand Familiar Phrases," and the Ambassador from Tegucigalpa used approximately 13,500 of them. He said that co-operation had taken the place of competition; that a man was a man for all that; that

[1] *Sinbad and his Friends*, New York (Henry Holt and Company) 1921, pp. 85–86. Quoted by permission.

> eternal vigilance was the price of liberty; that under no conditions would 2 and 2 make anything but 4; that genius was the capacity for taking pains; that Shakespeare was the common glory of mankind, whether Christian or Moslem; and that victory was only a question of time. At this point he was reminded of a colored uncle, named Ebenezer, who was propelling a mule along a lonely road at midnight. When the laughter had subsided he declared that he knew no better way of summing up the status between the two countries than by saying *Nihil humani,* unless it was *Labor omnia vincit.*

This may be taken as a classic illustration of how not to write an after-dinner speech.

In the third place, be careful under any circumstances not to make your speech too long. A good after-dinner speaker, because he is good, is apt to say too much. Even humor palls if one is subjected to it too continuously. Of the poor but long-winded talker it is unnecessary to speak. Nothing is more distressing than the efforts of the man who, as William Dean Howells says, "thinks as little standing as sitting, and whose words come reluctantly, but who keeps on and on in the vain hope of being able to say something before he stops, and so cannot stop." He is referring here

to the man who tries to talk without writing his speech in advance. But even a carefully prepared speech is better when short. At some dinners where the list of speakers is long, it is customary to set a time limit, generally fifteen minutes. (Even then there are speakers who will accept the rule cheerfully—and pay no attention to it.) But the speaker who talks too long, whether through weakness, stupidity, or indifference, is as little appreciated as the guest who outstays his welcome. Write your speech so that it will not take longer than fifteen minutes at the most to deliver. Generally five minutes will be better.

And now, by way of summary, the after-dinner speech is a form of entertainment which must meet certain requirements. It is the accompaniment of a social function and must be friendly, genial. It should be amusing; it must contribute its share to the pleasantness of the evening. It should at the same time convey a worthwhile idea. It should be simple, sincere, brief.

. . . . . .

In order that the speech you write may be free from the artificiality of a mere exercise, select an occasion on which you might be called upon to speak. You might write a speech that you would

have liked to make at a banquet which you recently attended (you may or may not have actually made a speech at it); or a speech to be made at a dinner of your preparatory school club in college, dealing with something the club can do to promote closer relations between the school and the college, or what the club has done and can do for its members; or a speech at a fraternity dinner at which something of present interest is to come up for discussion, such as plans for a new fraternity house or an inter-fraternity agreement. Possibly you could write a speech appropriate to a class banquet, or one for a farewell dinner to a friend before going abroad or getting married. These are natural occasions on which you might be asked to speak and it is well for you to see how you would acquit yourself.

SATIRE

SATIRE is a form of criticism which talks about its object in such a way as to render it subtly ridiculous. It is being witty at the expense of something you wish or pretend to wish abolished.

The sure mark of the satirist is a certain superiority to that which he is attacking. He never condescends to the earnestness of the reformer, the violence of the denunciator, or even the seriousness of the true critic. Though he may not really be a cynic, his tone is that of cynicism, mockery, a more or less mild contempt.

The best satires are both amusing and useful. The wit and humor of the satirist, his neat turns of language, his sparkle and point, and especially the malice which he bears the object of his attack, make his work humanly interesting and entertaining, especially, of course, if we understand the conditions at which his shafts are aimed, and sympathize with his desire to be rid of them. The usefulness of satire lies in its power to laugh away

certain fashions and follies which a serious attack might only establish more firmly. If a man has robbed a bank or committed a murder, satire would be out of place. All that is necessary is to state the facts and urge with all the moral earnestness in our power that the offender be punished. But if a man or woman affects extremes of dress or manner; if all the world falls to reading some sensational but worthless book or follows blindly after some charlatan in art or politics or business, preaching often proves less effective than the corrective laughter of the satirist. "When the world has gone astray after false gods, the satirist calls it back."

From this it is evident that satire is in spirit a derivative form of writing; it is destructive, noncreative. And since, moreover, it is so frequently turned against particular conditions which are themselves temporary and soon forgotten, satire is generally less permanent, less immortal than lyric, drama, or essay. Dryden's "Hind and Panther," which attacks satirically a situation peculiar to the religious life of his day; Pope's "Dunciad," much of which is devoted to pillorying poetasters long since forgotten; Byron's assaults on his adversaries—these and many other

once-enjoyable satires have only a sort of second-hand interest, if any, for the modern reader, because they have to be read with explanatory foot-notes. A few great men, however, have written satirically of weaknesses which are inherent in the very fabric of human society and human nature. The satires of Horace which deal with the perennial follies of a young man in love; Pope's finished mock-epic "The Rape of the Lock," which hits at the touchiness of aristocratic families on points of honor; Burns' arraignment of hypocrisy in "Holy Willie's Prayer," and especially Swift's "Gulliver's Travels," probably the most important satire in English, for its bitter portrayal of the eternal mixture of egoism and pettiness in mankind—these are satires that will live forever, because in addition to their perfection of form and depth of human understanding, their main themes are universal.

Moreover, the satiric spirit is permanent. It can be found in every age, pervading other forms, like the essay, the novel, the drama, and even poetry. It is very popular in America and England now, occurring both incidentally and in independent forms. The debater and the lawyer often use satire with telling effect, as do the jour-

nalist, the after-dinner speaker, the politician, the lecturer. Magazines which make a specialty of satire, like *Life* and *Vanity Fair,* are widely read; and novels, like *Main Street* and *Babbitt,* which may be described as extended satires, are among the best-sellers. Even in the ordinary affairs of life there are times when, aptly and gently used, satire accomplishes its purpose where direct criticism would only give offense. For the part that it plays, then, both in literature and in life, it is worthwhile for the student to understand how to read and to practice satire.

The way to write a satire is to think first of something which you dislike. It may be only one of your professors, or one of the courses which you are required to pursue in college; it may be some social usage or a form of entertainment which has bored you for some time; it may be a type of person, or an attitude of mind—anything that is overblown, highfalutin, strained, extravagant, extreme. Especially fair game is any form of insincerity; satire has been called "the great art of unmasking the hypocrite." But there is no need to particularize. Every one has his prejudices, and his answers to the question, "What 's wrong with the world?" You undoubtedly have

yours. The way to begin is to select some source of irritation which is "on your nerves" at the moment.

When you have selected a subject, consider what form will best convey your ridicule of it to your particular audience. For there is no one form consecrated to the satire. It may be a discussion, a narrative, a dialogue, a play. A satire on a man's appearance and manners would call for description. A conceited man could be attacked by setting down a dialogue in which his remarks about himself are punctuated by the rejoinders of an ironical friend. A political reformer's failure to keep his campaign promise to clean up a slum could be satirized by telling the story of a trip you allege you have made through that slum, in which you reveal ironically, through the conditions you depict, how little his promises are worth. The essay form, however, is the most direct. Simply select your subject, and talk about it.

Your success will be measured by the extent to which you cause your reader to laugh at what you are satirizing, at the same time readily acknowledging the justice of your implied criticisms. It follows, therefore, that a process of analysis of

your victim's weaknesses is an important step in your preparation. Reflect upon the particular causes of your dislike of the thing you mean to attack. What are its objectionable qualities, features, effects? A clever satirist writing for one of the comic magazines not so long ago [1] took as her subject, contemporary literature. Such a topic is an excellent test of one's power of analysis because it is so large and complex. After thinking over the problem, "What 's wrong with contemporary literature?" the writer decided to concentrate on four salient objections: (1) a great deal of bogus romance is purveyed nowadays, especially in travel books, novels, and stories about the South Seas; (2) there is a great deal of essay writing which we all speak of jovially as "delightful," but which is really quite feeble and pithless; (3) a number of writers are making an excellent living by feeding the public through books and movies with what is known as "raw meat"; (4) lastly, a great deal of our so-called realism is frankly dull. The delighted laughter with which readers of all kinds greeted her satire when it was published was due fundamentally to the absolute justness of the four underlying criticisms. Sound

[1] Dorothy Parker, "A Hymn of Hate," *Life*, Dec. 22, 1921.

standards, then, are the basis upon which your satire must rest.

Your second big problem is the actual phraseology in which you express your criticism; and here you will do well to read a number of good satires and try to catch the trick of it. You must not attack directly, for by so doing you produce invective, a very different thing from satire. The satirist's method is that of *irony* and *indirection*. Irony is saying one thing but clearly and cleverly implying another, usually the exact opposite of what you have said. Its commonest device is that of praising that which you wish to condemn, but praising it for the wrong things. For example, Nina Wilcox Putnam, in her article "A Few Remarks about Husbands,"[1] praises husbands for being useful. They can, she says, close trunks and open bottles. And "Husbands are also a great comfort in a lonely house at night," because of "the popular superstition that they will chase burglars." Other methods of irony are less obvious. In discussing the first of her topics, the satirist referred to on page 108 wished to criticize the tiresome way in which travelers to the South Seas sprinkle their books with native phrases,

[1] *American Magazine*, November, 1922.

lugged in for "atmosphere," and unintelligible and vexing to the American reader. This is what she says: "After his four weeks in the South Seas the author's English gets pretty rusty and he has to keep dropping into the native dialect." Here the irony is made perfectly clear by the phrase "four weeks," even if it were not already evident that "the author's English gets pretty rusty" is an intentional mis-explanation. It is, happily, precisely the explanation the traveler himself might give, an obvious affectation. In this way an insincere and really annoying practice is made doubly ridiculous. Upon her second topic, "The Little Book of Whimsical Essays," Miss Parker says: "The author comes right out and tells his favorite foods and how much he likes his pipe and what his walking-stick means to him —a thrill on every page." Of the realistic novel she says: "The big scene of the book is the heroine's decision to make over her old taffeta." Such clever misstatements and exaggerations have an irresistible appeal both to the reader's sense of humor and to his judgment. Obviously favorite foods, a pipe, and the meaning of a walking-stick are unlikely to be thrilling; remaking an old dress is hardly the material for a big scene. But the

amusement which accompanies the perception of these implied criticisms serves to fix them more firmly in our minds; and therein lies the value of irony.

By indirection is meant unexpected turns and twists of speech which partake of the nature of irony without being so easily classified. An excellent example is a couplet in "McFlecknoe" in which Dryden is convicting a luckless poet named Shadwell of being hopelessly obscure and meaningless. It would be possible to express Dryden's idea directly, thus: "I can understand some of what most poets say but I can make no sense out of Shadwell whatever." But that is not the satirist's method. What Dryden says is:

> The rest to some faint meaning make pretence,
> But Shadwell never deviates into sense.

The unexpected twist in the word *deviates*, implying that anything like sense from Shadwell could only be in the nature of an accident, has caused poor Shadwell to be remembered by amused readers some two hundred years after his name would normally have been forgotten. In the satire quoted from above, several excellent instances of indirection occur. Of the South-Sea traveler's

use of the sex-appeal, the writer says: "He implies that his greatest hardship was fighting off the advances of the local girls, but the rest of the book was probably founded on fact"; of the lurid sex novel: "The hero and the heroine may be running wild in the Sahara, or camping informally on a desert island . . .", where the word *informally,* with its connotation of pink teas and polite society thrusts itself in with ludicrous and telling effect.

There are various special tricks of irony and indirection which the satirist may use, but sparingly. One of the commonest is the double meaning, an apparently commonplace remark to which the context adds a hidden sting. "All my married friends tell me there is nothing quite like matrimony.—I agree," is a double meaning, when we know that the speaker has remained single through deliberate choice. "You are wasting your time on the amateur stage," says the satirist. But does he mean that you should go on the professional stage, or that you are wasting your time on *any* stage? "Every time I think of Fred I say to myself, 'There is such a thing as being too good-natured.'" But who is too good-natured, Fred, or Fred's friends? "Jones en-

joys poor health.'' Is this merely a trite phrase meaning Jones has poor health, or does it mean that Jones is a hypochondriac, and really enjoys it? Criticisms so phrased are apt to be remembered.

Absurd understatement, as in, ''It is but a question of time till the book is made into a movie, which is no blow to the writer''; bathos, or violent anti-climax as in, ''The author's idea of action is to make one of the characters spill the cereal''; overstatement, as in Mr. Strunsky's description of an awkward man: ''To see him eat a grapefruit was to witness one of the fifteen indecisive battles of the world''—all are forms of irony and indirection which, as well as all the other verbal dexterities you can command, are valuable in writing satire. The limit comes, one supposes, with those efforts at wit which depend purely on chance word resemblances, such as mar slightly with their suggestion of cheapness the satire quoted from above. Examples are: ''There is the novel of primitive emotions, the last word in unbridled passions—last but not *leashed''*; and ''The writer drowses along under the influence of *Pollyanæsthetics.''* Puns and ''telescope words'' should be yielded to only when they prove

irresistible; they should certainly not be sought after.

A variety of satire which is so common as to deserve special notice is the extended over-statement, or *reductio ad absurdum*. Many extremes of human action, custom, and policy lend themselves to this treatment. The over-emphasis upon system in modern business, for example, is the butt of the following passage from Ring W. Lardner's satire, "In Conference":[1]

> The conferees were sitting around the big table in the conference room. At the head of the table was J. H. Carlisle, president of the firm.
>
> "Where is L. M.?" he inquired crossly. "This is the fifth conference he 's been late to this morning. And we 've had only six."
>
> "Well, J. H. C.," said R. L. Jamieson, a vice-president, "I don't think we ought to wait for him. If we drag along this way we won't be able to get in a dozen conferences all day. And a dozen was the absolute minimum agreed on."
>
> At this moment the door opened and the tardy one entered. He was L. M. Croft, one of the vice-presidents.
>
> "I 'm sorry to be late . . . I was talking over

[1] *Liberty*, August 15, 1924.

> the phone to J. P. The reason I asked for this conference," he continued, "was to get your thought on a proposition that came up about twenty minutes ago. There was a post-card in the mail addressed to the firm. It was from the main post office. It says they are holding a letter for us which reached them unstamped. If we sign the card and send it to them, together with a two-cent stamp, they will forward us the letter. Otherwise they will send it to the Dead Letter Office. The question is, is the letter worth the time and expense of sending for it?"

Incidentally this illustrates the common device referred to above (p. 107) of putting a satire into the form of an invented narrative. The method of *reductio ad absurdum* could be applied equally well to the matter of professionalism in college athletics, or to government regulation of the citizen's private affairs—to any practice, in fact, of which we say, "This thing is being carried too far."

The commonest mistake in student satire is the failure to maintain the satiric tone to the end. The satirist's pinnacle is a tottery one, and the beginner, unaccustomed to preserving his balance there, finds himself falling back into seriousness.

He should remember that satire and seriousness will not mix, because they destroy one another. End your satire at the point when you feel inclined to cease jesting at folly and begin to preach instead. "When a man begins to moralize it is time to go home." You must not for a moment condescend to treat your subject seriously. A piece whose tone is prevailingly serious may, as has been hinted above, inject a satiric remark occasionally, for its import will stand out against the more literal discourse, and indeed will have the effect of livening up the whole. But in a satire one is not aiming to be impartial, or exhaustive, but to set one's audience laughing at something, presumably with a view to mitigating it or getting rid of it, in some way that will be decided on later. Any lapse into sober discourse will destroy this effect.

Satire, like all fun-making, has its degrees of kindliness and finesse. It may be gentle satire, mere friendly jibes; it may be satire with a sting; or it may be bitter satire, rendering its object ridiculous or contemptible. Again, it may amputate vice with a cleaver or with a razor-edged knife; it may hit it a cheap, resounding blow with a padded club or slapstick, or it may flick it with

the lash. Try to make your satire as gentle and as skilful as you can. The best satire has been described as a kind of "thoughtful laughter," which has a prophylactic and surgical power over human activity. Above all, remember that the best satirist is he who laughs also at himself, for his own acquiescence in the follies of the world, and for his very indignation at them.

. . . . . .

The student must choose his own subject for satire, from his own experience of men and women, of human institutions, customs, fads. Perhaps "Professors" will occur to you, and you adopt them tentatively as your subject. As you think over the professors you have known, you realize that they fall into groups, according as they are vulnerable to satiric shafts from one angle or another. Some of them, of course, are absent-minded, and it is easy to make a little gentle fun of them; some are taskmasters; some are "easy"; some of them are over-scholarly and reserved; some are "good fellows"; some of them are more like business men than professors; some of them are temperamental; some of them you could show your satire to, some you could not; and so on. Or, you may have been going about among

some of your friends who are married, and may have detected certain absurdities in husbands, and wives. Some of them are so domestic that they have almost dropped out of your ken; others are selfish, or domineering, or sentimental. Some type of person may appeal to your sense of the ludicrous: the Big Man on the Campus, the Westerner, the Easterner, the Young Intellectual, the Person Who Is Never Wrong, the Person Who Is Always in Love, the Faddist. Again, you may have suffered recently from being compelled to "live around" in restaurants, so that you are for the moment an authority on their faults; and you jot down suggestions like this: camouflaged food; bad cooking; bad service; foreign restaurants; dainty restaurants; quick-lunches. Or you have been motoring, so that your head is buzzing with the recollection of people who drive from the back seat; scenery painted by advertisers and "home town boosters"; tea-rooms with quaint names; small town traffic laws, and what not. And if you pick up a cheap magazine you may suddenly be struck by the absurdity of many of the advertisements: advertisements that offer something for nothing; that offer to teach you to draw, play the saxophone, be a gentleman, or make a

fortune; advertisements with pictures showing you how easily it can be done; with pictures of men pointing their fingers at you; advertisements that ask you questions, or tell you to do something you do not wish to do. The field of satire is literally, anything on earth, which means, anything that is not perfect; and the only man who has "nothing to write about" is the man who can honestly say, "To my mind, this is the best of all possible worlds."

AN EXERCISE IN VERSE

THE incorporation in this handbook of a chapter on the writing of verse was decided upon in no spirit of deference to Carl Sandburg's advice, "Catch your poet young." If there is anything that the world admits without debate, it is that a poet is born. Verse-writing is dealt with here out of a firm conviction that it is a valuable exercise in the development of style. Probably one could say without exaggeration that it is the most valuable. That metrical composition increases one's command of words, vigor of expression and imagery, and lends to style those finer qualities of ease and euphony is a commonplace. Probably training in verse contributes also to the basic merits of clearness, coherence, and conciseness. Undoubtedly the exercises in translating the Latin poets into verse given in English public schools are one reason that English boys and girls write so skilfully. We in America would do well to publish less verse, but write a great deal more.

It is not difficult to understand why attempts at metre are useful in developing the fundamental qualities of style. Consider for a moment what must have happened when W. S. Gilbert was writing one of his inimitably catchy quatrains, say the first four lines of "The Played-out Humourist." The idea had come to him to write about a man who earned his living by being witty. "It is a difficult task to think up new jokes," thought Gilbert. "Now, how shall I say that? The trouble is, of course, that the world has been saying funny things for a long, long time. . . . How long? Over five thousand years. . . . Ah, there's a line: 'This old world has been joking now for over fifty centuries.' . . . 'And all the really funny things have long ago been said!' And there is my metre established. Now, how to fit my first idea into that metrical scheme?" Having got his first line, "Quixotic is his enterprise and hopeless his adventure is" to rime with "centuries," he still had the problem of the idea "think up new jokes." What other words would do for *think up? Excogitate? Work out? Seek for? Look for?* Either of the last two fits the metre. Who seeks for . . . what is another word for *new? Novel?* Good! What is another word

for *jokes? Witticisms?* Novel witticisms. . . . It does not fit. *Scintillations? Quips?* No, they do not fit the metre. *Jocularities* does it! But this demands another phrase for *novel.* Who seeks for jocularities . . . that have n't yet been made!

> Quixotic is his enterprise and hopeless his adventure is
> Who seeks for jocularities that haven't yet been made;
> This old world has been joking now for over fifty centuries,
> And all the really funny things have long ago been said.

Perhaps it all came to him in a flash, by processes too delicate for such blundering analysis. But how often at the beginning of his career he must have had to cudgel his brain for *the* word, to take his expression apart and remold it to fit the metre! Always his question must have been, "How shall I say that?" And this is precisely the question which all composition teaching tries to make a man ask himself. It tries to make him see that every idea can be expressed in any one of a hundred slightly different ways, of

which one is better, for various subtle reasons, than the other ninety-nine. Verse-writing is valuable because it makes a man think about the minutiæ of style.

Some time during your courses in composition and literature you should attempt some verse. It is much easier than those who have not tried it suppose. Any one with a sense of rhythm can write verse. It may not be good verse, but it will be verse, and will therefore be of service in the manner indicated above. Experimentation with groups of ordinary people proves that not over one person in four is totally unable to beat with his hand or foot in time with the rhythm of verse. And at least some of those who cannot do it at first, can learn. The point is that nothing in the way of study is necessary. Children feel iambics and trochees, dactyls and anapests long before these fearsome terms are known to them. The way to begin is not to memorize a text-book on metrics, but to memorize some verse.

Begin with the easiest verse to write, blank verse. Learn the following passage, and say it over to yourself again and again.

> Much have I seen and known,—cities of men
> And manners, climates, councils, governments,

Myself not least, but honored of them all;
And drunk delight of battle with my peers,
Far on the ringing plains of windy Troy.
I am a part of all that I have met;
Yet all experience is an arch wherethro'
Gleams that untraveled world whose margin fades
For ever and for ever when I move.

When these lines ring in your head, and you feel the five beats in each, take a book or a piece of your own writing; read it for several pages, and see whether with a little transposition of the words, the ideas will come to you in that same rhythm. They may or may not happen to, the first time you try. If not, read something else. But very often you will find that what you read falls occasionally into blank verse almost without a change, even though it may be the most unpoetical material in the world. Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, lecturing on poetry to the undergraduates of Oxford, showed them on the first page of the University catalogue, in an explanation of the rules governing re-examinations, five consecutive lines of practically perfect blank verse. If your quotation is still beating in your head, you may make a similar discovery in a letter you have written. And then you will have

composed, in the humblest sense of the word, some verse. Your fear of the experiment will probably have vanished, so that you can go on to express in this rhythm other ideas of your own.

A slightly more difficult form in which to compose, because a new element, rime, enters into it, is the ballad stanza. It goes thus:

> God prosper long our noble king,
> Our lives and safeties all;
> A woeful hunting once there did
> In Chevy-Chase befall.

You find that you know this metre already; it is like "There was a man from our town," and other nursery rimes, and is very easy to remember. You will hear, as you say the stanza over to yourself, the same sound at the end of the second and fourth lines,—in other words, they rime. Rime is the exact agreement in sound of the accented vowel and all succeeding sounds in two words. In writing rimed verse you must be careful that your rimes are exact: *time* and *line, tone* and *home, bleak* and *lake* are not rimes. Nor is it permissible to use the same word to rime with.

Another common English type, scarcely more difficult to use than the ballad stanza, is the

heroic couplet. Sidney Smith's eulogy of "Salad" is an easily remembered example.

> To make this condiment your poet begs
> The pounded yellow of two hard-boiled eggs;
> Two boiled potatoes, passed through kitchen sieve,
> Smoothness and softness to the salad give;
> Let onion atoms lurk within the bowl,
> And, half-suspected, animate the whole.

Notice that each two lines might be a complete sentence in themselves, so that the couplets are like carefully wrought links in a chain. When you can produce a dozen smooth couplets in succession, without resorting too often to inversion —i. e. placing words out of their natural order in the sentence, as in "Softness and smoothness to the salad give," instead of "Give softness and smoothness to the salad"—you will have met and conquered some of the real problems of verse-writing.

As you grow freer in your use of verse, you may attempt still more rigid forms, such as the sonnet, the ballade, the rondeau, etc. The sonnet is the most used of these in English. It must have fourteen five-beat lines, which may rime as in the fol-

lowing example from W. E. Henley's "In Hospital."

> Her little face is like a walnut shell
> With wrinkling lines; her soft white hair adorns
> Her withered brows in quaint straight curls, like horns;
> And all about her clings an old, sweet smell.
> Prim is her gown and quakerlike her shawl.
> Well might her bonnets have been born on her.
> Can you conceive a Fairy Godmother
> The subject of a strong religious call?
> In snow or shine, from bed to bed she runs,
> All twinkling smiles and texts and pious tales,
> Her mittened hands, that ever give or pray,
> Bearing a sheaf of tracts, a bag of buns:
> A wee old maid that sweeps the Bridegroom's way,
> Strong in a cheerful trust that never fails.

By the time you teach yourself to use the sonnet form, learn in what detail the sonnet quoted differs from the Italian sonnet, and how tradition prescribes that the thought of a sonnet shall be developed, you will probably have read enough verse, and thought about it enough to plan further experiments for yourself.

Ideas suitable for expression in verse are hard

to find. In reality you don't find them, they come to you. But unless you have a rather strong impulse to say things metrically, unless your thoughts naturally fall into words with a certain beat, one of your greatest difficulties will be to discover a subject which seems to you in any way suitable. Perhaps the best way out of this dilemma is to rely on an idea which has already been expressed in verse form. But it would place you at an obvious disadvantage to take a passage from some familiar English poet, and moreover you would be constantly handicapped by your memory of his words, and would find it hard to get others of your own. Undoubtedly, however, you are studying French or German or Spanish, and have read some verse written in one of these languages. Here is the place to look for an idea. Take one of these poems and try to translate it into English verse. From your translation in class, you have no doubt learned that the idiom of one language cannot be turned into that of another by simply substituting the equivalents of single words. You must find the corresponding idiom in your own language. *Il y a* does not mean *he has there.* Moreover the meaning of your poet's thought will not appear unless you

find the exact phrase which catches all of its richness of suggestion. Let us take an example from one of Goethe's poems:

Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt
Weiss, was ich leide! . . .

What does *Sehnsucht* mean? Is there any word in English which will represent it? If you look in your German dictionary, you will find that the meaning is given as *yearning, longing, desire.* But each of these three English words implies another; we have a yearning or a longing for something, not merely a desire by itself. We must lend our translation, then, more color than the mere meaning of the word will furnish. Perhaps an added word will do it.

Only unfulfilled longing
Has known my sorrow . . .

Obviously this will not do, for the construction of the sentence leaves the idea unexpressed. The problem now hinges on *wer.* To make the meaning clear we must supply an antecedent for the pronoun.

Only he who has an unfulfilled longing
Knows the sorrow in me . . .

But surely this is very much a prose version of Goethe's poetic expression. Can we not preserve the meaning and yet lend the translation some semblance of the delicacy of the original? To do so it is necessary to depart from the syntax and *create* in English a rendition, not a literal translation of the sentiment of the German.

Only the longing unfulfilled
Can know the pain in me . . .

This approaches the sentiment of the lines and retains approximately their metre. Efforts of this kind will illustrate the problems of fitting appropriate expressions to poetic ideas which have been given you.

Naturally you will be more eager to try verse-writing if you have something that you wish to express. And the most obvious suggestion is to take one of the other assignments which appeals to you and do it in verse. There is a kind of verse appropriate to each. A spectacular, rapidly moving narrative will be best told in ballad stanzas; a light essay or a critical essay in couplets; metrical dialogue has usually taken the form of blank verse, as in Shakespeare's plays; and your

character sketch might well make an excellent sonnet, like the one on page 127.

Parody and satire gain distinctly in appeal to many readers if written in verse. Note the swing of the following satire, written by an undergraduate, and see whether it would fit yours:

THE INTELLIGENTZIA

Oh, I am the brains of the campus,
I 'm pallid, æsthetic and lean,
And the thoughts I embrace, in my cultural race
Have left their indelible mark on my face,
While perfecting my mental machine.

I never have time for athletics,
And physical sports are outré,
But a battle of chess, with its moments of stress
Is exercise violent I have to confess,
And gives me a thrill every day.

I often have arguments charming,
On this little novel or that,
Or on lovely free verse, with melody terse,
While I shudder with horror at metre or worse
And at rhymes so disgustingly flat.

Now campus activities bore me;
I never could give them support.

When I see Freshmen heel, I frequently feel
How awful are all the hours they steal
From things of a cultural sort.

I only read one publication—
The others are awfully coarse;
So I fail to subscribe to the rest of the tribe
And just from my own little Dial imbibe
The fine intellectual force.

. . . . . .

But no one appreciates genius;
I'll soon be forgotten, I fear;
For according to rule, a little hick school
Will find me dispensing my long-gathered fuel
At seventeen hundred a year.

If an idea occurs to you that you think might be put into verse, you may find it difficult to develop the thought at the same time that you are struggling with the difficulties of rime and metre. You are likely in this case to wander from your original intention. Try, then, writing out your idea in prose, or at least in brief outline. Suppose you think of an evening which you spent with a girl and on which you also spent a good deal more money than you intended to. You set down in the form of notes a description of the girl, jotting down probably more things than you

can use. Very well. You can select from them the points that you can use with best effect. Then you jot down ideas of how you came to spend so much—theatre, supper, taxicab, long ride. Perhaps you add your feelings at the end of the evening when you came back home and counted up what the entertainment had cost you. The result might be, when actually got into verse, something like the following. It is what one undergraduate did make of the idea.

A WELL SPENT EVENING

She was a phantom of delight,
  A lovely thing to see,
A college widow, fairly bright,
  But far too bright for me.

She led me on from thing to thing,
  And then to other things,
And as I followed, wondering,
  My wherewithal took wings.

We saw the show, we ate some place
  I 'd never seen before,
And only time can help erase
  The large financial score.

And then we bought a taxicab
  And motored round the state;

I got her home at twelve o'clock
And dropped her at the gate.

You ask me why I tell you this
In such sepulchral tones;
It is because that evening cost
Just twenty-seven bones.

If you are really interested in writing verse because it gives you pleasure to express yourself in this way, you are probably already familiar with the matters of technique, and do not need the elementary suggestions, discussed in this chapter. You are probably most interested in the spiritual process which results in poetry. It begins with something that awakens in you potent feelings, something that stirs you to reverence, yearning, keen joy, perhaps regret. Great occasions and great figures of the past, heroes whose achievements you revere, partings or reunions with those who are close to you, nature lovely or turbulent, these evoke thoughts in you which are the inspiration of poetry. Thinking about such a subject should make you want to tell others how you feel; but before you can do so, you must crystallize your feelings so that they may be clearly set forth. This process necessitates the search for

an idea which will adequately explain to the reader the nature of those complicated and often chaotic emotions brought to life by your realizations concerning what you have dreamed of or hoped for or lost. When you have discovered this central idea or theme of your poem, arrange your exposition in such a way that each stanza will appropriately develop or illustrate it, so that when you have finished, every word will be necessary for the full understanding of what you have written. This unity in expression is well brought out in the following poem, which unveils for us the mind of a soldier as he looks ahead to a battle in which he will take part:

I have a rendezvous with Death [1]
At some disputed barricade,
When Spring comes back with rustling shade
And apple-blossoms fill the air—
I have a rendezvous with Death
When Spring brings back blue days and fair.

It may be he shall take my hand
And lead me into his dark land
And close my eyes and quench my breath—
It may be I shall pass him still.
I have a rendezvous with Death

[1] *Poems*, by Alan Seeger, New York (Charles Scribner's Sons) 1917, page 144. Quoted by permission.

On some scarred slope of battered hill,
When Spring comes round again this year
And the first meadow-flowers appear.

God knows 't were better to be deep
Pillowed in silk and scented down,
Where Love throbs out in blissful sleep,
Pulse nigh to pulse, and breath to breath,
Where hushed awakenings are dear. . . .
But I 've a rendezvous with Death
At midnight in some flaming town,
When Spring trips north again this year,
And I to my pledged word am true,
I shall not fail that rendezvous.

The first stanza here states definitely the poet's theme; in the second he contemplates the subject and reflects on it; while in the last stanza the emotions which have been underlying and stimulating his thoughts reach an intensity which fuses the whole in the solemn pledge of the two final lines.

Naturally at this point one might well ask the question, "Suppose I do have something that I want to say, something I feel deeply about, and I conform to all the rules of verse writing, will the reader really get any pleasure from what I say?" This question cannot be answered yes or

no, for the reader is a variable quantity, but the probability of an affirmative will be determined by one quality of all poetry—inevitability. A poem which possesses this, is perfect in that all of its details, of sound, sense, and form, blend with one another into a completely satisfying whole. This quality comprehends and regulates whatever of originality, wit, humor, melody, grace, depth, the poem contains. If you measure what you have written by such a standard, you will no doubt find some ragged edges. It remains for you to work over the necessary revisions, often many times, until you have produced something, however brief—many great poems are only a few lines long—which seems to have come as close as you can make it to perfection.

PARODY

A PARODY is a piece of imitative writing with a humorous or satiric purpose. In practice parodies fall into three groups, which are discussed in this chapter in the order of increasing difficulty—and value. First, there are parodies of *form* alone; satires couched in the rhythm or phrasing of some well-known song, poem, "school-recitation," public document, etc., with amusing changes which leave the resemblance unmistakable. Second, there are parodies of *ideas* or *content,* with little or no imitation of the form in which these ideas are written, if indeed they are written at all. Third, there are parodies in which both the *form and content* of some original are suggested. To be sure, these groups are not mutually exclusive, for almost every parody cuts more than one way. For example, Kipling's "My Rival," in which a young girl voices her jealousy of an older woman who has eclipsed her socially, has been rewritten from the point of view of the older woman neglected for a resource-

ful and impudent modern "flapper." The metre and refrain of Kipling's original are closely followed, but the result is more than a parody of form. For although its main purpose is to satirize the modern girl, it also awakens by the additional similarity of the characters and the situations, a perception of the one-sidedness of Kipling's poem. Most parodies, however, belong primarily to one of the above three types. Any one with a strong sense of the ridiculous should find parody most amusing to write as well as to read, and will probably be glad to try his hand at the third sort. If, however, you find the undertaking difficult, you may begin with a parody of form.

Parodies of form are the easiest to write. But they have little or no value as criticism of their originals. They are ephemeral, *jeux d'esprit* of the moment; or they are used to lend point and brilliance to an argument, a bit of satire, criticism, compliment, anything at all. Recently, for example, two Senators employed in debate parodies of Leigh Hunt's famous poem "Abou ben Adhem," one for and the other against a man under discussion. "E. P. C.'s" tribute to Kipling on his departure from America gained grace and ap-

propriateness by imitating Kipling's own "Fuzzy-wuzzy":

> Then here 's *to* you, Mr. Kipling, and Columbia avers,
> You 're a poor, benighted Briton, but the Prince of raconteurs.
> You may scathe us and may leave us; still in our hearts will stay
> The man who made Mulvaney and the Road to Mandalay.

To complain of the difficulties of getting coal in the suburbs would be a commonplace undertaking enough; but to couch one's irritation in the metre and rime-scheme of Gray's "Elegy in a Country Churchyard," cleverly recalling "The curfew tolls the knell of parting day" and other familiar lines, lends it amusement and point.

ELEGY WRITTEN IN A COUNTRY COAL BIN

> The furnace tolls the knell of falling steam,
> The coal supply is virtually done,
> And at this price, indeed it does not seem
> As though we could afford another ton.
>
> Now fades the glossy, cherished anthracite;
> The radiators lose their temperature;

How ill avail on such a frosty night,
The short and simple flannels of the poor.

Though in the ice-box, fresh and newly laid,
The rude forefathers of the omelet sleep,
No eggs for breakfast till the bill is paid;
We cannot cook again till coal is cheap.

Can Morris-chair and papier-mâché bust
Revivify the falling pressure gauge?
Chop up the grand piano if you must,
And burn the East Aurora parrot cage!

Full many a can of purest kerosene
The dark, unfathomed tanks of Standard Oil
Shall furnish me and with their aid I mean
To bring my morning coffee to a boil.[1]

Kipling's "If," Poe's "The Bells" and "The Raven," "The Old Oaken Bucket," "Home, Sweet Home," nursery rimes, Hamlet's "Soliloquy" and Mark Anthony's Funeral Oration from "Julius Cæsar," the preface to the Declaration of Independence, the harangue of the barker outside the circus sideshow, are familiar originals frequently employed in verbal parody.

[1] Christopher Morley, *Chimney-Smoke*, New York (George H. Doran Company), 1921, p. 62. Quoted by permission.

Parody of form is not a difficult thing to do passably well; but neither is it particularly worth doing, unless you practice it extensively to perfect your technique or entertain your friends by your virtuosity, like H. C. Bunner writing "Home, Sweet Home" in the style of half a dozen great poets, or Carolyn Wells doing the same thing with a well-known limerick. The danger is that such parodies tend to become strained and feeble, mere buffoonery, often in bad taste. Quite recently an objectionable parody on the Twenty-third Psalm, beginning, "The Ford is my Auto, I shall not walk," has been going the rounds of certain newspapers. The effect of such violent incongruity is undoubtedly to cause a certain number of unthinking persons to laugh. But it is laughter without point, without approval. It has been argued indeed that the chief purpose of parody is simply to amuse; and other critics would say that formal parodies, however forced, have a critical value, inasmuch as only originals which are truly and permanently beautiful can survive being parodied. But the beginner risks falling into puerility or bad taste, in attempting verbal parody. If you can, then, try to write a parody of the second or third sort.

Much more valuable as criticism of its original is the parody of ideas or content. Here the method is frequently that of condensation. The writer knows that only that which is first rate will stand boiling down to its essentials. He therefore selects from a large number of examples of the thing he is going to attack the ideas which he considers entirely typical, exaggerates them slightly, perhaps, and says: "Here it is. What does it amount to?" He reduces, or pretends to reduce, the type to its lowest terms, so as to bring out its absurdity. A recent writer on the moving-pictures declares that all pictures have but one plot. "This," he says, "is it":

> The Summer Girl: (World Film Company) Judy is living with her father and mother at their country home. At heart she is a child of nature, though her family is vulgarly wealthy, and she falls in love with Punch, an impecunious young artist whom she meets in the woods. She makes the family's laundry woman pretend to be her mother, in order to make Punch believe she is a poor girl, and thus test his devotion. A bull chases Judy up a tree, and she is rescued by Punch.
>
> Judy's mother wishes her to marry a foreign count, and compels her to return to the city. Her

father is in league with Judy, and wants her to marry Punch. In the end the father and daughter win out; the count is made ridiculous, and the mother is mollified when she hears that Punch has just had a picture accepted by an art exhibit, which will make him famous.

Excellent illustrations for study can be found in Mr. Leacock's *Nonsense Novels*. Parody by condensation is also very popular in Europe, where tabloid plays are sometimes produced. Here is a parody-condensation of the old-fashioned type of blood-thirsty romantic tragedy:

ROSMUNDA

Act I

ALBION (*giving Rosmunda the skull of her father filled with wine*). Drink! It is the skull of your father.

ROSMUNDA (*horrified*). Oh!

ALBION (*commanding*). I wish it.

ROSMUNDA (*drinks*). Woe unto you!

Act II

ALBION (*affectionately to Rosmunda*). Why so sad?

ROSMUNDA. How can I be otherwise?

ALBION. What is past must be forgotten.

ROSMUNDA. Do not touch me.

ALBION. You hate me?

ROSMUNDA. How can I?

Act III

ROSMUNDA (*examines closely a stiletto; then calls*). Slave!

PERIDENS (*enters; kneels*). Queen.

ROSMUNDA (*passionately*). I love you.

PERIDENS (*astonished*). Oh, my God!

ROSMUNDA. Come with me. (*embraces him*)

Act IV

(*From adjoining room where King Albion sleeps, snoring is heard.*)

ROSMUNDA (*hands the stiletto to Peridens*). Go —kill him!

PERIDENS (*hesitating*). The King?

ROSMUNDA (*quickly*). Your rival.

PERIDENS. He shall die.

(*Exit*)

Act V

ALBION (*offstage*). Help!

ROSMUNDA (*listening*). Die! Die! Die!

PERIDENS (*rushes into the room with a bloody stiletto in his hand*). He is dead!

ROSMUNDA (*snatches the stiletto and holding it up to heaven, yells*). Now you drink, Father—now you drink!

(Curtain)

The most difficult and at the same time the most worthwhile parody, however, is a combination of the two types just discussed. It is a close imitation of a piece, or a whole school of writing, which criticizes the original by humorously exaggerating its defects of form and content. To write such a parody you must first, as in the satire, decide upon some target whose faults are obvious to you, and analyze as clearly as you can the qualities you intend to exaggerate. If, for example, you choose a lecture by one of your professors, you may very well conclude that the reason you wish to burlesque that lecture is that it is dull, monotonous, difficult to understand, impractical, and unrelated to ordinary life; or that the lecturer persists in telling old jokes, or cantering off on his pet hobby at unexpected and inopportune moments. You therefore proceed to write another lecture on the same or a similar subject, imitating the style and mannerisms of your lecturer as closely as you can but making

yours duller, more monotonous, harder to understand. Perhaps the lecturer is dull because he repeats himself; if so, you might indicate this by writing your ideas half a dozen times in slightly different words. Perhaps he is monotonous because he does not vary his intonation; if so, try to get the same effect on paper (possibly you could do it by using only words of one syllable). Perhaps he is difficult to understand because he uses unfamiliar and technical words; in that case use, if you can, an even stranger vocabulary. If his subject is impractical, take it still further into the clouds; if the jokes are old, search out the seven original jokes and include them wherever they will do the most harm; if the lecturer rides his hobby, introduce it oftener and with a ludicrous lack of relevance. Affected mannerisms of speech, favorite phrases, etc., are fair game.

The difficulty will be, of course, that you will find yourself going too far, exaggerating too much, in which case your parody will cease to be funny and become painful. Generally, if you are conscious of the danger, you will yourself know when you have fallen into it. If not, the best test you can apply is to read the thing to some of your friends and note carefully the points at which

their laughter becomes uncertain, or forced. It is possible to be funny without becoming grotesque or clownish, and the cultivation of your ability to be so will be useful to you in more ways than in your endeavor to write a parody.

Let us take an example of first-rate parody on a subject somewhat more difficult than a lecture. Some years ago a well-known magazine had an epidemic of articles in which divorced women revealed the dark secrets of their marital careers and showed how they had been victimized by their "brutal" husbands. The difficulty with these articles was that very often the writers unconsciously showed themselves to be almost as much to blame as their captors; or revealed that they had differed with them on trifling matters of domestic management or had suspected them of infidelity on absurdly small grounds. There came a time at last when a rival magazine felt that the public had had enough of these effusions, and published a parody which mercifully put an end to the series. It is not the subtlest parody that could be written, but it proved effective. It laughed a cheap, foolish kind of writing out of existence. It was called "How I Knew When My Husband's Love Grew Cold" and began thus:

"Now that I look back, it all seems so dark and far away that I wonder how I can bring myself to write about it. But I must be brave and let other women know what I have been through, so that they may go through it too and enjoy it as much as I did." (In other words the parodist asks: If you have really suffered a lasting hurt, why write about it?) Many of the writers in discussing what good wives they had been, disclosed that they had actually devoted very little time to the running of their households. This weakness the parodist has in mind when he makes his heroine say: "I was always an active woman. . . . And when I found myself married and settled down in a small southern Ohio city, I just naturally began to use my initiative to form neighborhood clubs, women's relief corps, experience meetings in the church vestry and such like little activities without which community life would be just like life anywhere else. I never dreamed that Royal would feel that he was being neglected."

The climax comes with the entrance of the "other woman." "Aunt Etta had been with us for perhaps three weeks when I first noticed . . . that Royal was very attentive to her. She was

feeble and as a consequence had to be helped about the house. Her age may also have had something to do with the inelasticity of her gait. But even taking all these things into consideration I still think that I had good cause to worry. Whether or not I was justified in my suspicions rests with the judgment of my readers on the following incident.

"It was a night in early spring. I had been to a meeting of our Women's Machine Gun Division and, owing to a premature explosion of one of the ammunition trains I reached home earlier than usual. As I entered the front hall I heard voices. There between the top and the bottom landing was Royal with his arm through that of Aunt Etta, *ostensibly* helping her up the stairs. There was a light in his eye that struck me cold. It was awful. All that night I did not sleep." And so on to a ludicrously unpathetic separation. The triteness, melodrama, and overuse of italics of such "revelations" are richly played upon.

A parody like the above is not beyond the attainment of the average man or woman of intelligence, and is a weapon of reform well worth cultivating. If you are successful in practising it once or twice, even, let us say, so successful as to im-

prove the type of fiction your home town paper prints, or the jokes or the advertising in your college "comic," perhaps you will be interested to go further, and attempt—or at least read—still better parodies. For parody is not the despicable art some people seem to think it. Great masters of it like Thackeray, Swinburne, Kipling, are agreed that "fine parody can be written only by a man who *loves* what he parodies." Like all imitation, parody may be "the sincerest form of flattery." The most penetrating prose parodies of contemporary literature are an illustration of this: you will find them in Max Beerbohm's *A Christmas Garland.* The sixteen chapters of this delightful book are really friendly tributes to a number of the author's literary friends; they are done with but the faintest trace of malice, while there are lines and passages which the authors imitated would probably be glad to have written. Parody, then, may be itself a distinguished literary form, and may play a part in the development of your style, if you have literary ambitions.

In conclusion, bear in mind two bits of practical advice. First, before you write your parody, steep yourself in your original; know its every

detail as exactly as you can; possibly memorize it. Also, steep yourself in parody; learn its methods, good and bad, by reading as much of it as time permits. You will have no difficulty in finding examples, for like satire and for the same reason, it is enormously popular in America just now. You will find it in the "columns" of the newspapers; in almost any book by Stephen Leacock; in *The Cruise of the Kawa* by Capt. Walter E. Traprock" (a take-off on the South Sea travel books); in Donald Ogden Stewart's *Parody Outline of History* and *Perfect Behavior* (travesty of books of etiquette); and in Carolyn Wells' *A Parody Anthology* and *A Book of Humorous Verse.* Second, remember that the thing you parody *must* be familiar to the audience who will read it. A parody of a mediocre novel you happen to have read, or of what seems to you a foolish experiment in the psychology laboratory, would be worse than pointless except to the few people who have read the novel, or are taking psychology. To be entirely on the safe side, take only the things that "everybody knows." As Miss Wells reminds us, parody is always "a tribute to popularity."

The prospective writer of a parody in thinking over examples or kinds of writing which seem to him for one reason or another ridiculous, should remember that there are degrees of obviousness in them. Some authors' faults are on the surface, mere mannerisms; while in other cases feebleness of idea or infidelity to life is so obscured by the dexterity of the writing that one finds it hard to say just what is the matter. The beginner should choose a subject which gives him a little, but not too much difficulty. Almost any one, for example, can take a sentimental or sensational story or play or moving-picture, and retell it in so condensed a form that it will seem ridiculous,—heightening the absurdity of its tinsel romance or mechanical thrills by recalling them in homely, common-sense terms. Somewhat more difficult are children's bed-time stories, with their puerility of style, personifications of animals, trees, etc.; movie sub-titles, full of bad nature poetry, "big" questions, and general sentimentality; and the detective story, in which the extraordinary acumen of the detective, the business of throwing suspicion on every one who could not possibly have committed the crime, the garbled physics and chemistry, are familiar features which we

laugh at even while we enjoy them. If you wish to try a verse parody see what you can do with a popular song, its false emotion, slang, vulgarity; or with the uneven lines, strange vocabulary, trivial and bizarre subjects of bad free verse.

THE CHARACTER SKETCH

THERE are two ends which the description of a person may serve, one practical, the other artistic. And the description will differ considerably in material and treatment according to which purpose you have in view. In the description written for purely practical purposes, it is generally sufficient to treat only of such features as would enable a reader to identify the person described. Imagine, if you will, what it would be necessary to say about some one whom you wanted a friend to meet at the station, or better still, a person who the Philadelphia police had reason to think was bound for St. Louis. A description sent to the authorities in St. Louis would emphasize those features which would be immediately noticeable and which it would be impossible for the individual to alter: his height, weight, build, and so forth. Some details that would be given considerable prominence in an artistic portrait would probably be passed over lightly, such as a mustache, which he might have

shaved off on the train. Other characteristics, which might be toned down or altogether ignored in a work of art, would be given exceptional emphasis, such as a prominent scar, a limp, or the loss of an arm. In any case the description would be limited to the man's physical appearance because nothing more is necessary. The practical portrait is like a photograph made for purposes of identification, and is not difficult to write. What we are here concerned with is the artistic attempt to represent a person in his whole appearance, character, and personality. The character sketch bears the same relation to the identifying portrait as an oil painting bears to a snapshot.

The art of description is first of all the art of selection and in your character sketch your power of picking the salient feature, the significant detail, is put to a very severe test. To describe a person in such a way that he will be distinguishable from all other persons means that you must find those things in which he differs from other people. In numerous respects one person is very much like another. Many men are tall, or stout; many wear dark suits. While such obvious points in his appearance cannot be

ignored, they do not help one particularly to recognize an individual. But if you represent him as hawklike, the number of other persons who would answer to your description is greatly reduced. Moreover the difficulty of writing a good character sketch bears a very distinct relation to its length. Generally speaking, the shorter your description is, the harder it is to do. If you have four or five pages in which to develop your character, you will probably manage to touch on at least some of the distinguishing features of your subject. But if you are compelled to catch your likeness and convey it in half a page, the necessity for making every word count is even greater. In so short a description you must select with unerring judgment the telling points that really differentiate. Generally a good character sketch can be written in about five hundred words.

In a very concentrated portrait there is no room for preliminaries. If, however, your space is not severely limited and you are free to add a paragraph or two, you will find that the time is not wasted that you devote to painting in the background against which you choose to describe your subject. A well chosen setting is helpful

in various ways. It may suggest the thing with which your character's whole life has been identified, as does a painting of a great chemist which portrays him in the midst of his books and retorts. It may help to indicate the kind of man he is. You will get two different impressions of the President of the United States if you see him in the morning at his desk and in the afternoon on the tennis courts of the White House. But the background must be appropriate, not arbitrarily chosen. Those old-fashioned photographers who photographed every man with his fingers between the pages of a book, whether he was a scholar or a man whose reading seldom extended beyond The Farmer's Almanac, are striking examples of what the writer of a character sketch should not emulate. But if your choice of the setting in which you will portray your character is a happy one, such a beginning will furnish not only a natural and easy introduction to your subject, but will contribute in an important way to the impression you are trying to create of him.

In any form of descriptive writing one of the great problems is to introduce something like order into the observations that come crowding

in upon you. A mere glance out of the window will show you that the mind is capable of receiving hundreds of impressions simultaneously. You may see trees and mountains, the sky, clouds, a sunset, the shapes of things, their size and color, their relations and distances, and at the same time hear the rustling of trees, feel the breeze, and catch the smell of the woods. Likewise in looking at a person, many of the details that go to make up your impression are seen at a glance. Yet you cannot say more than one thing at a time, and in your effort to create in the mind of the reader a picture similar to that which he would get if he could once look at the person you are describing, you are compelled to analyse your impression into its component parts and present these parts in a sequence. Unquestionably the simplest process is to arrange them in the order in which you perceived them. So you begin with whatever is immediately visible, whatever strikes you at a glance.

To take a concrete illustration, let us suppose you are going to describe the President on an occasion when he delivers an address before a large gathering in your city. This is a natural situation in keeping with the President's char-

acter and position. While you sit in the audience waiting for him to speak, you catch your first glimpse of him as he walks on the stage amid the applause of the people. As he crosses the platform to his seat, you take in at a glance the chief points of his appearance. You notice whether he is tall or short, thin or stout, well-knit or lanky and loose jointed. You get an approximate idea of his age, whether he is young, old, or in middle life, note whether his hair is light, dark, or gray, whether he is clean-shaven or wears a beard. Also you will get a general impression of how he is dressed; at least you will notice whether he is in street or evening clothes. All these perceptions and probably others flash across your mind instantaneously, and you would naturally set them down first in your description.

In dealing with such externals it is well to remember that description is not mere enumeration. A skilful writer does not specifically assert the existence of qualities and features; he mentions them incidentally for what they contribute to the whole impression he is trying to create. In this way he avoids wherever possible such colorless expressions as "there is," "there are," "he had," and the like. Notice how often in the

following passage the writer does not simply say "she had broad shoulders"; "her eyes were blue"; "she had ear-rings," etc. She says:

> She was emphatically what men call a "fine woman," with her firm, white neck, her broad shoulders, her deep bosom and strong waist. . . . Her face was brown and slightly freckled, with a warm color on the cheeks. The features were strong, but any impression of heaviness was at once dispelled by a pair of eager, living blue eyes. Big jet ear-rings dangled from her ears, being matched by a double string of beads, over her crape-frilled bodice. Indeed, with her plumes, her ear-rings, her necklace, her frills, though all were of a decent and respectable black, she faintly shocked the opinion of Walland Marsh, otherwise disposed in pity to be lenient to Joanna Godden and her ways.

Your perception of external appearance generally requires no very extended observation. But the longer you look at a person, the more you realize that from facial features, carriage, and even dress you can infer qualities of his character. Conrad says of Lord Jim, the hero of one of his novels, a man driven all his life by his conscience:

> He was an inch, perhaps two, under six feet, powerfully built, and he advanced straight at you with a slight stoop of the shoulders, head forward, and a fixed from-under stare which made you think of a charging bull . . . (His) manner displayed a kind of dogged self-assertion which had nothing aggressive in it. It seemed a necessity, and it was directed apparently as much at himself as at anybody else.

One's mood and emotions are often revealed in one's face, and these in turn may indicate character. At times a bit of narrative helps to indicate changes of feature and their significance:

> As I gazed with all my eyes, I found more than grace and beauty in that wonderful face,—found pride, wit, fire, determination, finally shame and anger. For, feeling my eyes upon her, she looked up and met what she must have thought the impudent stare of an appraiser. Her face, which had been without color, pale and clear like the sky about the evening star, went crimson in a moment. She bit her lip and shot at me one withering glance, then dropped her eyelids and hid the lightning. When I looked at her again, covertly, and from under my hand raised as though to push back my hair, she was pale once more, and her

dark eyes were fixed upon the water and the green trees without the window.

Likewise clothes, while they do not make a man, contribute to your impression of him. If he is too fastidious in his dress, you may suspect him of personal vanity and possibly pettiness of mind; if, on the other hand, he is careless about his appearance, you may infer anything from general slovenliness to mere unconventionality and lack of concern for the accidents and trivialities of fashion that smaller minds observe. In any case, you do not need to be told what kind of man wears a conspicuous check suit, a red necktie, a large diamond horse-shoe pin, and a green hat.

In so far as you do not merely describe externals but use them as clues to personal qualities and character, you are getting further and further from the apparent, and penetrating more deeply into the man himself. There are still other things which reveal character. One of these is action. Consider in the following description how what the young man does upon entering a train suggests his personality:

He leisurely divested himself of his trim overcoat, folding it in exact creases and laying it

> gingerly across the back of his seat; stowed his traveling-bag; smoothed his hair with a masked movement of his gloved hand; pulled down a buckskin vest, opening the lower button; removed his gloves and folded them in his breast pocket, while with the same gesture a careful forefinger, unperceived, assured itself that his lilac silk necktie was in snug contact with the high collar whose points, painfully but in perfect style attacked his chin. Then, settling, not flopping, down, he completed his preparations for the journey by raising the sharp crease of the trousers one inch over each knee—a legendary precaution which in youth is believed to prevent vulgar bagging. Each movement was executed without haste or embarrassment, but leisurely, with the deliberate *savoir-faire* of the complete man of the world he had become at the terrific age of eighteen.

Or suppose you describe a man coming home with a fishing rod in his hand and his little girl running to meet him. Together they put the rod away and then he lightly tosses the child on his shoulder and strides eagerly up to the house. Your reader will have a better idea of what that man is like than you could probably give him in any other way.

There is still another way, however, in which

you can reveal character,—namely, through what a person says and the way he says it. When a man says "I seen it," or "I ain't got none," you know much more about that man than what he tells you. The person who, like Mrs. Bennett, is always saying the wrong thing in public, the man who constantly voices his grievances against society, the kind of man who never has a good word for his employer,—all these are instantly recognized by what they say. Miss Rachel Crothers in her play *Nice People* represents a group of very sophisticated young women saying the most unpleasant things to one another with studied politeness. One of them says: "Of course everybody's chasing Scottie Wilbur. Ethel Montague is at it hard. *She's* the one who says Scottie wants to marry *you* for your money, Ted [Theodora]. Silly of her to say that, is n't it?" At that point one could almost hear the audience murmur "The cat!"—so completely did the words suggest the speaker's character. Likewise, what a man says is often an index to his mind. When the speaker on the platform (to return to our previous illustration) begins to speak, you are introduced to his ideas, his powers of thinking and reasoning, and the education,

training, and culture that underlie his thoughts and his manner of expressing them. You observe whether he thinks easily, whether words suggest themselves readily and without effort, or whether the workings of his mind are slow, his ideas are unwieldy, and his utterance is difficult and stumbling. You can tell, too, what his attitude towards life is, and whether he is of broad or narrow views. It is not necessary to reproduce the man's address. A well chosen quotation or a few characteristic phrases introduced naturally will often carry a sufficient implication.

All that we have said so far about the process of character portrayal has been based upon the assumption that we become acquainted first with a person's appearance and later with his mental and personal characteristics. Therefore we began with externals and proceeded in turn to those qualities which were revealed by his appearance, his actions, and his speech. The procedure is logical and effective, but it must not be thought the only way to write a character sketch. In fact the number of other ways is limited only by the skill of writers in using them. For example, suppose the person you decide to portray is some

one whom you know very well, so that you instinctively think of him as the embodiment of some quality or characteristic. Suppose he is inclined to be pompous. You might begin by striking this keynote in your opening sentence and make everything in your description help to create in your reader's mind this impression of self-esteem and importance. You might treat in successive paragraphs the fastidiousness of his dress, the dignity and formality of his bearing at all times, the confidence he has in his opinions and the oracular way in which he delivers them, and so on. Another way of organizing your description might be in a succession of pictures each representing the person in a different situation. If you were attempting to portray your roommate you might represent him first in his pre-breakfast mood; then in class; then on the athletic field; then out with a girl, etc. Any plan that is orderly and will avoid rambling will generally be satisfactory. And if your aim is to convey to your reader an accurate idea of an individual's whole appearance and character, the result will be a character sketch.

Throughout this chapter the assumption has also been that the subject of the character sketch

is a real person. But some of the most effective character sketches which you are likely to read are of people in fiction, the products of the author's imagination. Such characterization employs all the methods here illustrated, but the novelist creates individuals who might have existed in real life, but did not. Various actual people may contribute to them. Thackeray, for example, says that Amelia in *Vanity Fair* was in part his mother, in part his wife. But nobody could confuse Amelia with either, for she has an existence of her own in the mind of a genius. Moreover the emphasis on this or the other trait is affected in subtle ways by the story and the author's philosophy of life. Also the characterization in a novel may extend through eight hundred pages: an example is Arnold Bennett's *Clayhanger*. But such character portrayal is the problem of the fiction writer and need not be here discussed.

There is one variation of the type that deserves a moment's further attention. The purpose of the character sketch as outlined above is to portray a person truthfully. By a slight exaggeration of one of the methods suggested in a preceding paragraph—the method of empha-

sizing the dominant trait—you produce *caricature.* Caricature is intentional distortion. Instead of representing things as they are, caricature selects certain features of a man's appearance, certain characteristics or mannerisms, and exaggerates them; proportion is sacrificed, but the effect is amusing and often helpful for the criticism that is implied. Caricature is sometimes a rough attempt at portraiture, which succeeds because a few striking characteristics are so presented as to suggest an individual. Thus it parallels the art of the cartoonist, which a few years ago represented Roosevelt by a great pair of eye-glasses, a broad smile, a large row of teeth, and a sombrero. The caricature is not difficult to do; perhaps the method will be sufficiently illustrated by the following description of a Swede by a Swede.

> Olaf is a Swede—not an Americanized or an acclimatized Swede, but a red, raw, native product. If his name gives some slight hint as to his nationality, his appearance just roars it out. Olaf is about six feet four inches tall, built on the lines of a freight boat. He is stoop-shouldered, long-armed, long-legged, long-footed.
>
> The most interesting part of his physical make-up

is his head. It is exactly nine by nine by nine. His hair is like mouldy hay; his forehead is a mere streak; his ears are like a pair of wings. To hunt for expression in Olaf's countenance would be to waste your time. It may have been there, but his features hid it. Certainly his eyes would reveal nothing. They are large and glassy, like those of a flounder, and they bulge like hobnails. His mouth, the most used of all his facial organs, is spacious —as it needs to be—and from hence come loud, strange noises,—loud when eating and strange when talking.

Olaf is most fastidious in matters of dress. His necktie is not blazing red, but there is red in it, and also pink, and also green, and its life-sized horse-shoe pin shines brighter than sunlight. His best suit is a "ripper," a latest English model. The coat is the size of a tent, and the trousers fit like feed bags. The pattern is an imitation of the star spangled banner. . . .

Caricature may be more subtle than this, may involve so slight a distortion as to shade imperceptibly into geniune character portrayal. This is illustrated by many of the characters in Dickens' novels. But even at its best caricature

is not geniune characterization. It is discussed here in this brief way only to bring out more clearly the nature and purpose of the true character sketch.

THE LOCAL COLOR STUDY

THE term local color study as used in the present chapter means an extended descriptive sketch of a neighborhood or "locality." It is a subject upon which every man is an authority, in a certain limited field, since every man knows well one or more localities, which his classmates, his teacher, and the public may or may not be acquainted with. The reader's enjoyment of such a description may come either from the charm of the unknown or from the pleasure of recognizing familiar things.

Moreover it is a kind of writing which is not dependent solely upon an innate gift. Both the power to observe and the power to present your observations to a reader, make him see what you saw, are faculties which can be cultivated by practice. Nor need you have traveled extensively, or indeed at all, to be able to produce at least one good local color study. Since Rudyard Kipling began to combine the functions of special correspondent and fiction writer in his stories about

India, and Bret Harte discovered the West for literature, the far-off, strange, out-of-the-way places of the earth have been done and overdone by a horde of "local colorists." Even so, the United States, a large and rich field for picturesque, contrasted communities, each with an individuality, a "local color" of its own, has not begun to be exhausted.

Your own home town obviously offers the best material for you, because you know it best. If you will think about it, you will realize that it differs from other towns in numerous important details. A community is likely to take on the characteristics of the district in which it is situated. A town in the midst of a farming country will differ in appearance, population, and activity from a mining town, or one near a lumber camp, or a fishing center. The main street in such a village, for example, with its post-office, churches, and small shops, will not look anything like the notorious Western mining town of a few years ago, where twelve out of thirteen buildings were saloons. The few people one sees on the street are quiet, settled, and usually prosperous in a small way, though you perceive this rather from their business-like independence of manner than

from their dress. Saturday night witnesses no more stirring scenes than farmers and their families making their weekly purchases and perhaps indulging in the luxury of a movie. The mining town, on the other hand, was seemingly deserted through the week, and on Saturday night the noisy activity, the street brawls, the din of mechanical pianos, and of drunken men, indicated only too plainly that the place existed for this weekly influx of rough pleasure-seekers.

If extremes of this sort are unfamiliar to you, you may know the characteristic differences which mark a middle-class suburb, a fashionable suburb, or the industrial community often to be found on the outskirts of a large city. If you are city-bred, you know the "old" part of town, little Italy, the Chinese quarter, the slums, the artists' colony, the business section, the theatre district, the "bad" neighborhood, the "exclusive" apartment district, the fine old neighborhood which is degenerating, perhaps the water-front. Or if you do not see interesting possibilities in your own home town, you may have visited some other place for a long enough time to grasp its essential qualities. What you are looking for is a neigh-

borhood with a unity, an identity of its own. Once you recognize that your prime requisite as a local color writer is a district that you can know thoroughly, you will see that your trouble is abundance, not lack, of material.

But it cannot be too strongly emphasized that you must take a district which you know. The instinctive reaction of many young writers to a local color assignment is to select for description some place they have never been to—the South Sea Islands, for choice, or the Frozen North. The results are pretty sure to be unconvincing; the charming, dark-skinned Polynesians, naïve, hospitable, all wearing red hibiscus flowers in their hair; the Canadian half-breeds who say "Gar!" to each other, and "Mush, mush" to their dog-teams, are too obviously reminiscences drawn only from fiction and travel-books. Any one who had been to these places would know this at once. Any intelligent reader would. But a man born in Rangoon or Singapore will tell you that reading Kipling's *Kim* makes him overwhelmingly homesick for the sights, the sounds, the very smells of the bazaars. And this kind of reality your picture must have. The only way to

get it is to know thoroughly, at first hand, the place you write about.

In presenting material so complex as the thousand and one possible impressions of a place, the student's greatest difficulty, perhaps, will be in organization. A little thought may lead him to see that he has three kinds of impressions to record: impressions of externals, impressions of the people and the life of the place, and emotional reactions toward the community as a whole. He will, of course, begin by setting down any preliminaries which seem to him necessary, such as his point of view; he may need to mention the season of the year, the time of the day, whether or not the aspect of the place as he will show it is typical or for some reason unusual, and so on. That done he begins the description. The order in which he arranges the three kinds of impressions, should be the natural one for him, that is, the order in which he became aware of them. Probably he shows us first the externals of the place, its sights, sounds, smells; its size; its bustle or quietude, its prosperity or shabbiness, its antiquity or up-to-dateness—everything that he became aware of at once. If his subject is a secluded valley in the mountains of eastern Ken-

tucky, he may view it first from a nearby peak, then take us down into the village at the foot; if the picture is of a city, he may stand on the top of a tall office building, or stroll along the main street, looking into shop-windows, or out along the boulevards, or into some famous building. So, in outline at first, and then in greater detail, he gives his reader the look of the place.

But the local color writer is interested in more than mere externals. He is interested also in the people, and their life. He will tell us whether the majority of the people he meets are American or foreign-born; how and how well they are dressed; whether they are busy or idle, cheerful or stolid or sad; what is their attitude towards a stranger. If they collect in groups and talk, he will pause to listen; if they are working at some distinctive occupation he will watch them and tell us what they do and how they do it. He will compare these men and women with other men and women elsewhere. He will see everything from the way they walk to the look in their eyes, and hint at the secrets in their souls. He will speculate upon their past, upon their home life, upon their children, and grasp at every suggestion of a solution to these mysteries.

Local color is inexhaustible. If the observer turns another corner, mingles with another crowd, he may feel that all he has written is as nothing compared with what he might tell. But he can never know more than a fragment of the truth. When, therefore, he has described the locality as he knows it, at such length as space and the interest of his readers will permit, he prepares to make an end. But he has one more duty to perform: he must try to convey the spirit of the place, its atmosphere. He will seek a big, over-all generalization which filters out to him from all the details and lesser impressions he has set down. It is more personal and often more illuminating than anything that has come before: it expresses the emotional impression left with him at the end of his experience. "On Broadway, the spirit of optimism strikes fire." "In his rejection of the West the Turk has not been able to keep the West out of his city, and the West is beginning to soak into his soul." "The bonny, merry city—the good, gray city—O that one who has mingled the wine of her bounding life with the wine of his youth should live to write the obituary of Old San Francisco!" With some final reflec-

tion such as these, he bids the reader, his companion in the search for local color, farewell.

Yet even into so natural a method of presentation, an element of descriptive art must enter. To be sure, your success will be measured by how closely the effect of your writing approximates to the actual experience. But you must realize that to tell all that the reader would experience is undesirable, and in fact impossible. And to bombard him with the mass of disconnected, chaotic sense impressions he would actually get in visiting the place, would only confuse and perplex him. Your function is that of guide, of skilled observer. You must therefore begin at once (1) to select, and (2) to generalize upon, your material. Let us suppose that you have chosen for your subject that most typical and picturesque spectacle of our civilization, a great metropolitan thoroughfare,—Broadway, let us say. You must abandon at once all hope of getting down the innumerable general impressions you will have of it, and determine upon one, preferably of course the most definite, the strongest. Then you will select those details which have made upon you this general impression, and of these compose your

picture. A recent writer on Broadway, for example,[1] after telling us that he walked up Broadway, strolling, lingering over this or that sight which interested him, and that it happened to be springtime, begins his picture by saying that what struck him most forcibly was "the odd circumstance that in Broadway shop-windows nature is almost never herself, but is either supernatural or artificial." And this he supports with a wealth of observation.

> The windows on Broadway glow with wax fruits and with flowers of muslin and taffeta drawn by bounteous Nature from her store-houses in Parisian garret workshops. Broadway's ostrich feathers have been plucked in East Side tenements. The huge cigars in the tobacconist's window are of wood . . . etc., etc.

When he has sufficiently established his initial impression, he goes on to present other impressions which supplement the first, or explain it, or correct it. And no matter what your subject, or how complex your material, this is what you must do. This process, of supporting your generalization with details which led you to form it, is basic

[1] Simeon Strunsky, "The Street." *Atlantic Monthly*, February, 1914.

in descriptive art. So James Huneker, picturing for us a great American pleasure resort begins, "Coney Island is only another name for topsy-turvydom." Then, rapidly, he sketches in details:

> . . . nerve-racking entertainments, ends of the world, creations, hells, heavens, fantastic trips to ugly lands, panoramas of sheer madness, flights through the air in boats, through water in sleds, on the earth in toy trains . . . elephants tramping ponderously through streets that are a bewildering muddle of many nations, many architectures; deeds of Western violence and robbery, illustrated with a realism that is positively enthralling; Japanese and Irish, Germans and Indians, Hindus and Italians, cats and girls and ponies. . . .

The illustration just given deals with externals; but the principle applies equally well in dealing with people and the life of a place. The writer may speculate upon what makes a "typical" New Yorker or a "typical" Californian. Gazing at a crowd as it surges past him, or as it sits attentively in a theatre or a church, he may dwell upon what seems to him their strongest trait: "I pause at the Subway entrance," says Mr. Strun-

sky, "and watch the earth suck in the crowd. It lets itself be swallowed up with meek good-nature. Our amazing good-nature! . . ." And whether the writer speculates, or draws upon his intimate knowledge of a place, he selects for us always those people and scenes which illustrate its life in little. A suburbanite mowing his lawn, stock-brokers bidding, shouting, gesticulating, the pouring of the mould in a great steel mill, the interior of a well-known hotel or restaurant at the busy hour,—anything and everything that he sees or knows to be distinctive of that place more than of any other, he will show us. In particular he seeks out that spot which in every community is known as "the center of town," the place where you are "sure to meet everybody you know," and stations himself there. But always his method of presentation is the same: he selects those details which make the truest picture, and frames them for us in a generalization.

To read a first-rate description is the next best thing to going to a place yourself. And the secret of its power over the imagination is the *concreteness* of every detail, its direct appeal to the senses; whereas the fault with most amateurs in local color writing is to neglect concrete

particulars either because they have not seen them sharply or because they do not realize the need for explicitness. In describing, let us say, Barnegat Bay, it is not enough to say, "There are plenty of places to go, and good bird-shooting." That is a very faint kind of local color. In the hands of a more experienced writer such a sentence would "come out" as the image emerges on a photographic negative in the developing bath: "There are countless sedgy creeks and marshes to explore, and the mud-hens, the yellow-legs and their little cousins the peeps, the ducks and the wild-geese, all fit into my vision of myself on a misty morning, crouching back of a blind, with a pipe, a gun, and plenty of ammunition for both." He would not say, "Overhead innumerable birds flew homeward." He would tell us what kind of birds, what colors, how many, how they flew. This absolute definiteness, of observation and statement, you must—and can—cultivate.

An important factor in the vividness of good description is the ability to use words accurately and suggestively. The man who says *scintillation* when he means *gleam; blazing* for *flashing; stooped* for *drooped; flitted* for *skimmed,* etc.—needs to whet up his vocabulary. Nor is it enough

to rely on literal meanings. A word may have a sound or association or background which enables it to suggest more than it says, makes it peculiarly fitted for some descriptive effect you have in mind. Consider how freshly a familiar and unpleasant sound is conveyed in the following sentence: "The pneumatic hammers *scold* and *chatter* through the sultry hours." No amount of searching and reflection to get such words is wasted. What verb describes best the noise of a Morse sounder? To what can you compare the thin, high, sucking sound of heavy automobile tires on an asphalt pavement?

In this connection, remember that description is not confined to the things that you can see. It can represent the sounds, the smell, the "feel" of a place. Use your senses other than your sight whenever you can. If you have ever visited a prison or an "institution," you probably remember almost better than anything else the characteristic limey, depressing smell of the place. And notice the use of sound in the following description of a water-front from Poole's *The Harbor.*

> But I knew the harbor by day and by night, on bright sunny days and in fogs and rains, in storms

of wind, in whirling snow, and under the restful stars at night that twinkled down from so far above, while the shadowy region below twinkled back with stars of its own, restless, many-colored stars, yellow, green and red and blue, moving, dancing, flaring, dying. And all these stars had voices, too. By night in my bed I could hear them—hoots and shrieks from ferries and tugs, hoarse coughs from engines along the docks, the whine of wheels, the clang of bells, deep blasts and bellows from steamers. And closer still, from that "vile saloon" directly under the garden, I could hear wild shouts and songs and roars of laughter that came, I learned, not only from dockers, but from "stokers" and "drunken sailors," men who lived right inside the ships and would soon be starting for heathen lands!

The local color study is sometimes written for its own sake; sometimes it is an element in fiction. In the latter case it is largely incidental, and the total impression is created by scattered passages of description and brief suggestions woven into the narrative. Otherwise its methods when employed in fiction are not essentially different from those here explained, and in general the local color study is an excellent preliminary to an attempt to use description in narrative.

DIALOGUE

THE literary device of having two or more persons talk together has been put to many uses. It is, of course, the method of drama. It was used by Plato as a means of presenting philosophic discussion. In "Imaginary Conversations" Walter Savage Landor made special and artistic use of dialogue to reveal the characters of great historical figures and to compare the ages in which they lived. In European literature and more recently in English literature there have been instances of short stories or episodes revealed almost entirely through dialogue. *Anatol* by Arthur Schnitzler, Anthony Hope's famous *Dolly Dialogues,* and Kipling's *The Story of the Gadsbys* are examples.

It is evident that there is an underlying reason why writers on such widely different subjects should cast their work in this form. The fact is that to many people dialogue is more interesting than third person prose because of the human

element one is aware of so intimately in the speech, and the fellow feeling and informality of mind which one can cultivate toward the supposed speaker. Plato knew this when he reported the dialectic of Socrates in the master's actual words. It was an attempt to popularize, to dramatize the material. The method has been by no means forgotten. No one will doubt that Finley Peter Dunne's opinions on politics are enjoyable partly because he created Mr. Dooley to express them for him.

A writer who has a story to tell will do well to learn how to make his characters tell it for him. For one thing, they can tell necessary facts much faster than he can; and for another, conversation quickens the reader's interest by breaking up the solid look of the page, and by being easily and rapidly read and understood. Its greatest value, however, is in its revelation of the character of the speaker. In De Maupassant's story "The Necklace" there are two principal characters, an ambitious woman and her husband. De Maupassant lavishes two pages of lucid analysis upon the character of the wife. Of the husband we have but one glimpse: we see him sit down at the table, lift the lid from a dish, and hear him ex-

claim, "Aha, the good old stew! I don't know anything better than that." Yet the husband is equally clear in the minds of most readers. After we have heard him say these words, we do not need to be told that he is a practical, materialistic sort of fellow, in poor circumstances, apt to make the best of things without being pathetic. Or note in the following how artfully two personalities are made to emerge:

"Have you heard that Netherfield Park is let at last?" [A gossip is speaking, probably also a woman with social aspirations.]

"No," said Mr. Bennett. [Evidently Mr. Bennett is not a very good-humored or talkative person.]

"But it is. Mrs. Long has just been here and she told me all about it." [A gossip, certainly. Mr. Bennett does not answer. His precise state of mind is not clear, but he is evidently indifferent.]

"Do you not want to know who 's taken it?" [Mrs. Bennett persists. She is not a person easily suppressed.]

"You want to tell me and I have no objection to hearing it." [A harassed gentleman with a tolerant wit of his own.]

Thus Jane Austen introduces to us in the first half page of *Pride and Prejudice* two of her characters, and makes us understand and remember them. That is the value of dialogue.

Practise dialogue by making two or three (preferably only two) persons talk together for several pages. You may assume some personal relation between them, which develops and perhaps results in some action. This will be easiest to do, for it is in crises of greater or less seriousness that verbal restraint breaks down. You may give them some topic to discuss, in which case you are apt to reveal only the speakers' ideas, not their temperaments, unless the topic has human interest. But neither is necessary: simply choose some occasion, the most obvious being a call or a dinner-party, on which your people would naturally foregather, and let them talk about the things they would naturally talk about. You may, if you wish, give the dialogue some opening or closing remark. But concentrate upon revealing what kind of person each speaker is (1) by what he says, (2) by the way he says it. [1]

Character is indicated by what a person says.

[1] For further discussion of the topic treated in the next two paragraphs, see above, pp. 164–166.

After you have been talking to a stranger for five minutes you have at least formed some notion of whether he is strong or weak, happy or unhappy, ambitious or lackadaisical, intelligent or stupid, cunning or frank. You may not know all of these things but you will know some of them and a great many others. Practise getting this revealing quality into the speeches of your characters. What kind of person says each of the following? "Divorce you then? Because I 'll not do that. I 'll have no dirty linen washed in the courts." "It was me again, it was me as usual. Oh dear, how will it all end?" "Say, if you 'll just make up your mind that your troubles are all over and really think it, there 's nothing to it!" Write a kindly speech; an impudent one; a despairing one, etc.

Many other qualities of the speaker are revealed by the way he says things. One's grammar and vocabulary reflect one's station in life. The manner of a speech, whether halting, fluent, rambling, or curt and incisive, tells us much. Cultivate your ear for these things in the speech of those about you and see how accurately you can present them on paper. Of course, as a recent writer on the subject well reminds us, not

everything a character says need bear "the stamp of individuality. There are many occasions in which the speech of one differs not at all from the speech of another, in which no characterization is possible. There is a common ground of utterance of which all that is asked is that the speech shall not be out of character."[1] Give your people as many distinguishing speeches as you can, however, and be sure that the character revelation is not self-contradictory.

The most important thing in writing dialogue is to represent the legitimate differences between written and spoken English. Aside from slang and profanity, there is a whole section of one's vocabulary which we call colloquial, i.e. words peculiar to conversation. Contractions like *I 'm, can't, does n't, is n't, you 're* are entirely proper. Where we would write *perhaps,* we say *maybe;* what we call *obstinacy* (on the printed page) in conversation becomes *bull-headedness.* Conversely, there are a large number of words with which we are familiar, which are not colloquial. Can you without self-consciousness use in conversation the words *ephemeral, gratuity, aggran-*

[1] Carl H. Grabo, *The Art of the Short Story,* New York (1913), p. 175.

dizement, postulate, disquisition, promulgate? Probably you can not. And by the same token, you should not make the characters in your dialogue say them or words like them. Moreover the structure of conversation is less logical and less formal than that of written English. Listen to two people interestedly conversing, and you will find that a large percentage of their sentences is never finished. Sometimes this is because the speaker wishes something to be implied rather than said; the suggestiveness of the spoken word is another of its charms. More often it is because the other speaker interrupts. Note in the following how realistically the speeches are interrupted, or trail off.

"Yes, I know, but men are so foolish. You see, Archie thinks—"

"Of course he does."

"You might let me finish."

"Archie thinks you were never in love before."

"Yes he does . . . well, of course I was n't in love with Phil—"

"Not a little bit?"

"Oh, well—"

Most frequently a spoken sentence remains unfinished because a new idea strikes the speaker.

Conversation is less coherent than formal discourse. Moreover the structure of finished sentences is simpler. Periodic sentences become loose. Every one knows the person who talks in long spineless sentences, with the main idea in the first clause, and half a dozen afterthoughts. Complex sentences are broken up into a succession of simple assertions without the connective words, the *since's* and *as's* and *therefore's*. For example, "I told Miss Burt last night, as I foresaw that we would have to have her confidence and help," would probably be spoken thus: "I told Miss Burt last night. I knew we 'd have to have her confidence and help." If you find that your dialogue turns into a formal series of ideas in which first one, then the other of your characters delivers himself of a long, perfectly rounded speech, stop and begin over, for your product will be unreal. Try to represent dialogue as an interchange, in which the listener often interrupts before the speaker is finished and in which the speeches are as brief, the expression is as free and unself-conscious, the subject shifts as rapidly as in good conversation.

It often happens that a dialogue can be more successfully dictated than written. If you can

press your roommate or some friend into service, do it. He need not know shorthand. The pauses while you are thinking what you want to say next will usually give him plenty of time to get your words down. This process has two advantages. The very act of speaking aloud is likely to make your choice of words more natural. And in the second place, there is less likelihood of your inserting the little connectives and logical references that are so customary in ordinary prose but so frequently absent from real conversation.

The merit of dialogue, then, is to be absolutely natural. But if that is so, why might you not take down some actual conversation, turn it in, and have completed your assignment? The answer is, because it would be hopelessly uninteresting and ineffective. Much of our talk is completely commonplace in subject. On rare occasions we hear keen-witted people with an easy command of language converse so well that we say, "It 's as good as a play." But this seldom happens. If you listen to a conversation between average people, you are likely to find that each takes half a dozen speeches to say what a character in a novel would say in one. In other

words, literary dialogue is a kind of shorthand. The writer's task, says Mr. Grabo,[1] is "to clarify the turbid and wasteful flow of speech and direct it into exact channels. His characters must speak to an end, and that end must be swiftly and accurately realized. In so far as dialogue attains this artistic perfection it differs from the language of every day. It is selective and interpretative rather than literal."

When all is said, however, the success of your dialogue will depend less upon your skill in representing colloquial English artistically than upon the characters themselves. They must be real to you, the kind of people you know, not stock types remembered from your reading. In the following student dialogue, for example, the characters are painfully artificial, and both of them "talk like a book."

> MRS. PRIMROSE: Marie, do you not think that you have caused quite enough disturbance since you have been here? Freda tells me that last night you were talking to Carl again. This must and shall be stopped!
>
> MARIE: But Aunt Belle, I protest that I was in the living room when he came, so that I had to speak

[1] *The Art of the Short Story*, p. 178.

to him. Certainly you do not wish me to be discourteous to guests.

MRS. PRIMROSE: I shall tolerate no more of your impudence, young lady. Your familiarity with Carl is lamentably out of keeping with your position here. It is, in fact, inexcusable.

MARIE: I assure you that I meant no harm. The fact is, Carl does not interest me in the least. On the contrary, I have tried to avoid him. I am extremely sorry if I have done the wrong thing.

Any intelligent man who has heard human beings talk could rewrite this so that the expression would approximate more nearly real speech. But even then, it would continue to be artificial, for it is too clearly the story of "Cinderella" in the style of some amateur play which the author has read.

The principal fault in student dialogue is not so much that the characters do not speak naturally, as that they all speak like the same person, and that person the author in his most literary vein. This is especially true when he tries to make the talk prove something in which he himself is interested. It will help if in the beginning you choose strongly contrasted characters, and give them some topic or situation which will pro-

duce a disagreement, a clash of views or temperaments. But above all you must project yourself into their minds and their personalities, and make them talk as *they* would talk.

Since dialogue differs in form from ordinary prose, a word on its mechanical arrangement may not be out of place. First of all, make a new paragraph every time the speaker changes. If you use quotation marks, the common practice is to use two for the first quotation, and one more for a quotation within a quotation. Should there be still other enclosed quotations, add two marks and one mark alternately.

As to explanations, try to write each speech so that it will need as little interpreting as possible. And when you do find it necessary to tell which character is speaking, get away from the tiresome, "he said," "she said," "said he," "said she," each followed by an adverb. Try to make the verb do the work. *Growled, admitted, agreed, whispered, shouted*—any number of other verbs will serve, though extremes such as "he grated," "he agonized" are cheap. Never use asides for any purpose. You may, if it is easier, set down your dialogue as dramas are printed, i.e. with the name of the speaker at the left of, or above each

speech, followed by the necessary explanation or accompanying action, in parentheses.

. . . . . .

As to subjects: for your instructor's sake, spare him dialogues such as are recited by the lady elocutionist of your home town. "The Stout Lady at the Ticket Window," "An Irish Family Having Its Picture Taken," "Little Willie and his Mother at the Seashore" are examples. Do not use dialect, negro, German, Irish, or what not. Do not make your dialogue cover a whole day, with lines of dots to show where the gaps come. Do not go too far afield for your subject (Anthony and Cleopatra at a Football Game) or introduce speakers in chorus (A Dialogue between King Solomon and his Thousand Wives). A kindly old couple entertaining their nephew on his vacation from college, a man and a girl having luncheon together, two roommates, one of whom is preparing to go out for the evening while the other has to study, are the kind of thing that is meant. Get people and a situation that are real to you.

THE EPISODE

AN EXERCISE IN WRITING FICTION

PRECEDING chapters — The Character Sketch, Dialogue, and The Local Color Study —contain advice about three of the elements of story writing, character portrayal, conversation, and setting. The narrative episode, with which this chapter is concerned, is really a combination of these elements. Since the present volume is not another "manual of short story writing" or "handbook of the technique of the novel," nothing will be said about those prime requisites of the fiction writer's art, convincing psychology and a plot. It is not necessary that you visualize or plan out a story as a whole, but only that you have in mind a scene or two which are to you so true to life and so interesting that they *might* form parts of a story. Incidentally, if you entertain the prevalent—and by no means necessarily false—notion that, if you only had the time to try, you "could write better stories than half the trash

the magazines print," here is an excellent test of your ability. And if you have no such idea, you will still be rewarded for the exercise by a valuable increase in your power to appreciate the problems and achievements of narrative art.

Structurally, the average short story of 2500 words or more is a succession of brief episodes or "scenes," so arranged that they lead up to some crowning and conclusive action. In this respect it is like a play. Recall for a moment any long play and you will realize that it proceeded by a succession of scenes, each marked off by the raising and lowering of the curtain. It is the same with a story, except that the breaks are not always so apparent, although they may be marked by numbers or blank spaces in the text. In a typical story the first "scene" will describe to you the setting in which the action is to occur, or take you into the situation which gives rise to the action, or introduce you to the central character or characters. Frequently it does all three. Then come scenes of action, of character revelation, of suspense rising in intensity to the climactic and final scene. There is, of course, no set formula, and the plan given above is perhaps not even the best theoretically. On the other

hand, it is difficult to conceive of a story without some sort of explanatory beginning, some sort of rising action, and some sort of climactic end. And it simplifies the problem for the beginner to think of each part as developed in a succession of scenes.

Imagine, then, two such scenes: one the action of which suggests a story; the other a scene of strong emotional or dramatic quality, which might be the culmination of a story. The two need not be related in any way. Write these scenes. In the first, try to bring out by action or conversation or both, a human situation which has in it a conflict, or the possibility of a conflict, which would become more and more intense if the story were to be continued. This conflict may exist between two or more of your characters, or in the mind of a single character. Such a scene must be done with the greatest compression, yet without becoming mechanical or dull. Observe how much a competent writer, Donn Byrne, is able to tell us in a brief episode of this type, in his vivid tale, "The Wife of the Red-Haired Man."[1] Moyra Campbell, who, with her husband, the Red-Haired Man, has come from Ireland to America

[1] *Red Book Magazine*, June, 1918.

years before, is now a widow with two sons, Patrick, a prominent judge, a hard man who cloaks his hardness under a pretence of idealism; and John, a lovable rover. In the opening scene Patrick has been advising her with somewhat selfish motives to go into a home for old people. He alleges that he may have to leave New York, in which case she will have no one but the irresponsible John to take care of her. "It 's hard, surely," is her only comment. Then follows this scene:

> The clatter and din of the avenue without had been intermittently advancing into the room and retiring like the wash of a tide. The elevated clattered by, helter-skelter, on its way to Ninety-third Street; and as it died off into the distance, a comparative quiet ensued. Faintly up the stairs of the apartment-house came a rich baritone singing softly. . . .
>
> The old Irish love-song came throbbing through the door, now rich and low, now tender and high, now rippling into a current of grace-notes. The old lady smiled with an expansion of muscles that gave the impression of sudden light. The Judge grimaced.
>
> "That 's John!" the mother said. "I 'll see if his dinner 's ready."

The door opened noisily, and the verse ended in a swinging note of triumph. . . . He stood on the threshold for an instant, a careless smile about his mouth: six feet if an inch, two hundred pounds if an ounce, gray-eyed, full-faced, nose straight as a Greek's, mouth small as a woman's, and his dark-red hair rippling back from his forehead like water fanned by a wind. Then he strode across the room and kissed his mother,

"And how 's Mother Machree?" he asked.

"Oh, sure, I 'm fine, John," she answered, but there was a hint of nervousness in her tones. For the first time he seemed to become conscious of his brother's presence. He straightened himself and looked his brother between the eyes.

"So you 've been at it again!" All the bantering note had gone from his voice.

"I 've been telling mother some common-sense facts," the jurist answered with dignity. "My conscience—"

"Ah, you and your common-sense and your conscience!" John snapped disgustedly. "Let them trouble you yourself and don't come around bothering anybody else with them. You make me sick!"

The Judge shrugged his shoulders and rose to go.

This is not writing for the most critical reader, but it is perhaps just as valuable for not seeming

too far beyond the emulation of a very modest beginner in story-telling. It *is* a thoroughly workmanlike scene, swift-moving, with strict economy of effects, and above all, interesting, human. In a word, it has story-telling power. Note how deftly the author describes the setting, a cheap apartment. He has already inclined us to dislike Patrick. Contrastingly, we are attracted to John before he appears, by the fact that he comes singing, and singing well, a love-song. We see in one sentence how welcome to the mother is the entrance of warm-hearted love into the situation, and realize that John is her favorite of the two. The relation between the brothers is also flashed before us: "The judge grimaced."

The tenderness his mother bears to the younger boy, and something of his robustness of physique and spirit are indicated when she exclaims proudly, "That 's John," and thinks at once of his dinner. "Noisily" bears out the robustness as does the fine bit of compressed description which shows him standing in the doorway. He is charming, romantic-looking, and a good son. His single-minded devotion to his mother appears in the fact that he does not become aware of his brother's presence except through its effect upon

her. As he straightens himself and looks his brother between the eyes, his other qualities, impulsiveness and manliness, develop, and the promise of some action. He says, "So you 've been at it *again.*" Much virtue in "again"; it tells us what a sentence or a whole paragraph previous to this moment could not have told half so effectively. Finally, as hot words on the one side, cold, self-righteous ones on the other, are exchanged, we have the emotional basis for the conflict which the story develops and finally resolves.

This quite elementary analysis does not include all the skilful touches in the scene, but we have learned enough about the setting, characters, and situation to see what story-telling power is. Quite without our being conscious of them, a hundred unanalysed and unanalysable impressions have come to us, infinitely complex, yet all serving to render what follows understandable and convincing. Meanwhile we have been carried well into the story, and our interest has been closely held.

Select, then, some characters, in a situation and surroundings which are to you as familiar and as lifelike as those described above and attempt to make them talk and act so as to suggest

the possibility of important developments in their relationship in the near future. Perhaps you think of a restaurant you have visited; a man and a girl are dining together, and talking in low tones; suddenly the girl rises and with eyes straight ahead walks out of the place, leaving her companion gaping after her. It is worth trying to set down such an incident with what you imagine must have been the conversation which led up to what you saw. If you cannot help wondering what happened afterward, and your mind spins with theories of the far-reaching changes in the life of each which this simple act may betoken, so much the better. Or perhaps you see a young man sitting in a train, while other passengers walk up and down the aisle finding seats. He is expensively but wrongly dressed, and evidently more than a little nervous. Another man, older, better poised, with the quiet, self-contained manner of the well-to-do gentleman, brushes by. The first man sees him, makes as though to rise, then catches himself and sinks back into his seat, flushing painfully. Picture for us the train, the stuffy air, the bustle; show us the first man, tell who he is, where he is going, what he is thinking

about; do the same with the second man; tell the incident dramatically, and tell us why the younger man decided not to speak, and suggest what his past and future relations with the other may have been. Two student roommates who have had a falling out, whose talk and actions reveal some vital disagreement between them; a girl stranded on a lonely road beside a broken-down expensive car—there is, of course, no limit to the situations you may imagine in which there is this alluring quality of portentousness.

If this type of episode calls pre-eminently for workmanship, the second type suggested requires first of all imagination, and the ability to make your style rise to emotional heights, without unsteadiness, or stridency. Its problem is not to introduce the diverse factors which enter into a story, but to move the reader emotionally. It is by no means a mere academic exercise to practise writing such scenes entirely apart from any thought-out story. Many good tales come to their authors first as stirring climaxes, which they study, motivate, lead up to, place in a proper setting. In fact, the isolated emotional scene has been written professionally with some success,

notably in a contest held by *Life* for the shortest possible short story.[1] The best of these are genuinely moving, despite their brevity. And they are simply the climactic scenes of much longer stories, allowed to stand alone, with explanations compressed into a word or two, or left to the reader's imagination. They are tragic, heroic, or humorous, for the most part; they are not sentimental love stories; very few have "happy endings." A man whose wife is secretly in love with his best friend, takes poison, leaving for the guilty pair a brief, simply phrased note in which he reveals that he has known from the beginning, and can stand the situation no longer; a French soldier returns to his war-ruined town, to learn that his sweetheart has become the victim of a German soldier's cruelty; a young "tough" submits to a blood-transfusion operation to save the life of his sister and reveals when it is over that he believes that he has been giving his life to save hers. Such situations as these are furnished to every one by life; even though they may not actually have arisen in a man's own experience, he learns of them from the experience of his friends, from

[1] See *Short Stories from "Life,"* New York (Doubleday, Page & Co.), 1916.

the gossip of his profession, the grimly matter-of-fact revelations of returned soldiers, or the human welter of the news. Perhaps he imagines the consequences to himself of yielding to some emotional impulse which he has felt but restrained. Some of them will have come to you. Take the most vivid of them, and describe what happens as simply and strongly as you can.

A word about the handling of such scenes: it is a fundamental mistake of inexperienced writers to suppose that anything of real value can be accomplished by words when the stuff of life is not there; that style is something clapped on from the outside, a sort of adornment which can somehow atone for feebleness of characterization and motive. Hence when the beginner comes to present a strongly dramatic episode, he is apt to summon up all the fine sounding phrases, the overworked emotional words, the melodramatic tricks of action and gesture, the spectacular effects, which he has caught from bad stories and bad plays. He writes of blood-red sunsets and purple dawns; of "broken men" and of "the painted lure of life"; he tells us that "she threw wide her arms in a gesture of exquisitely passionate renunciation." But intelligent readers do not

thrill to this sort of theatricality; rather they suspect the author of being insincere. The only sound basis for success in dealing with emotional material, is to write nothing save that which overflows from you under pressure of a profound imaginative conviction that people talked and acted in that and no other way.

And the vast majority of life's tragedies and triumphs happen unpicturesquely, unpoetically, to men and women who have only the meagerest power to express their feelings in words and gestures, and the greatest unwillingness to express them at all. The perception of this truth has led in modern times to the creed of realism, to the tradition of expressing life in words, and in a key, which are nearly, though not actually, life's own. And when such unassuming words are so finely chosen that they can *bear* the weight of the emotion you have to convey, they render your effect a hundred-fold more poignant to readers of our time.

It is in keeping with this tradition that "Thicker than Water"[1], the prize-story in *Life's* contest mentioned above, is made to end

[1] Ralph Henry Barbour and George Randolph Osborne, in *Short Stories from "Life,"* p. 217. Quoted by permission.

before the heroics begin. A girl has been hurt and has lost a great deal of blood. She is lying in the hospital when her brother, a young man of twenty, appears. He is told that her life depends upon a blood-transfusion.

> The boy drew in his breath and paled visibly.
>
> "You mean Nell 'll die if some one don't swap his blood for hers?"
>
> "Unless the blood she has lost is replaced—"
>
> "Well, quit beefin'," interrupted the other roughly. "I 'm here, ain't I?"
>
> When he entered the operating room the boy gave a low cry of pain, bent over the form on the table, and pressed his lips to the white forehead. When he looked up his eyes were filled with tears. He nodded to the surgeon.
>
> Doggedly, almost defiantly, he submitted himself, but when the artery had been severed and the blood was pulsing from his veins to the inanimate form beside him his expression changed to that of abject resignation. Several times he sighed audibly, but as if from mental rather than bodily anguish. The silence became oppressive. To Markham it seemed hours before the surgeon . . . nodded to the nurse. Then:
>
> "You 're a brave lad," he said cheerfully to the boy. "Your sacrifice has won!"

The boy, pale and weak, tried to smile. "Thank God!" he muttered. Then, with twitching mouth: "Say, Doc, how soon do I croak?"

"Why, not for a good many years, I hope." The surgeon turned frowningly to Markham. "Did n't you explain that there was no danger to him?"

"God! I 'm afraid I did n't!" stammered Markham. "I was so keen to get his consent. Do you mean that he thought—"

The surgeon nodded pityingly and turned to the lad. "You 're not going to die," he said gently. "You 'll be all right tomorrow. But I 'm deeply sorry you 've suffered as you must have suffered the past hour. You were braver than any of us suspected!"

"Aw, that 's all right," muttered the boy. "She 's my sister, ain't she?"

In selecting your material for a dramatic scene, avoid mere physical accidents which awaken only a sort of impersonal terror, because we do not know the person involved. A fall from a great height, an automobile accident, a man overboard at sea, a rescue from drowning—such events as these are fiction material only if we have previously been made to know the person, believe that he really existed, and *care* what happens to him, or if we know what the accident means to some

other character whom we care about. Failing some genuinely moving experience of your own, imagine such an experience befalling you or some one you know well. A woman tells a man whom she loves that she cannot marry him; a man returns home to find that his wife with whom he has quarreled has left his house; a cripple who has been told that his case is hopeless and has been gradually and grimly accustoming himself to the thought, learns that by a newly developed operation he has a chance of recovery; a woman finds that her brother whom she has adored all her life is a scoundrel—these are examples of "big moments" in life which are well within your knowledge and worthwhile attempting to portray.

THE FAMILIAR ESSAY

THE familiar essay is distinctly a form of artistic writing. It has none of the practicality of the business letter, the argument, the editorial, or the popular exposition which is known as the feature article. Yet, while it is possible for a man to go through life without ever writing a familiar essay, he will be much more interesting to other people if he can write—and talk—in the familiar essay vein. As a matter of fact, every man talks about himself—his sports and hobbies, his family and friends, the plays he has seen and the things he has read, the "little annoyances incident to his profession," his likes and dislikes, his enthusiasms and his prejudices. And there are few men who have not attempted to comment upon life or some phase of life entertainingly, in conversation and in friendly letters. When a man does that he becomes, in a modest way, a familiar essayist. The intense devotion of your next-door neighbor to a saxophone inspires you to remark in a tone of good-humored

annoyance upon the joys of living near an amateur musician. You take a business trip and write home about your Pullman car acquaintances, the conversation in the smoker, the discomforts of small town hotels. These are not serious matters; but your pleasant discussion of them is one of the amenities of life. A little practice in the familiar essay will enable you to do the thing more easily and gracefully, and will develop in you a versatility of style which will lend distinction to all your writing.

A word of warning is needed at the start as to what the familiar essay is not. There are many other kinds of essays, admirable in their respective spheres, the purpose of which is different from the purpose of the familiar essay. There is the biographical or historical essay, practised by Macaulay; the moral essay, like Bacon's; the critical essay; the philosophical essay; the informative essay on politics, science, or the arts. The object of these is to teach; their appeal is basically to the intellect. They are all methodical and objective, and have an immediate practical application. The matter dominates the writer to an extent that it does not in the familiar type. These forms of essay are capable of high literary

development, but as treatises on serious things, they are by nature serious in tone, and lacking in that friendly informality which is the distinctive quality of the familiar essay. The familiar essay is a thing more difficult, and more artistic.

And now, what is the familiar essay? It is the discussion of anything, however trivial, which happens at the moment to interest you provided it can be treated in one of the moods in which you would converse with a friend. Thus its spirit may range from humor or gentle satire to a fine, friendly seriousness. The principal thing that you do not do to your friend is to lecture him. Beyond that there is almost no limit to the subjects of which it may treat. Poor Relations, Old China, A Dissertation on Roast Pig, On Lying Awake at Night, Thumbs, Spring House-cleaning, On Holding a Baby, In Praise of a Lawn-Mower, The Gentle Art of Repartee, Every Man's Natural Desire to Be Somebody Else—these are some of the subjects on which familiar essays have been written. Yet, though the range of the familiar essay is almost unlimited, its character is none the less clearly marked by certain ever-present qualities. These are indicated by the terms Personal Essay, Informal or Conversational Essay,

Light Essay—all of them names by which the Familiar Essay is at times known. Let us see what qualities these names imply.

The familiar essay is to an unusual degree *personal*. The writer feels free to talk about himself, the subject he knows best. He says *I* without self-consciousness, well knowing that if he talks without vanity or pretension, without being boastful or snobbish, the world will be very glad to listen. He takes the reader into his confidence, reveals his personal habits and tastes, discusses frankly his preferences and prejudices, confesses his weaknesses. By being sincere in his revelations he is certain to be original. He does not wish to be what other people are; he is interested in being himself. His eccentricities are not ironed out; he is a non-conformist holding out against collective mediocrity. Nowhere outside of lyric poetry can he express more subjectively his inner self—not what he does, but what he thinks and feels and is. Charles Lamb writes: "I know less geography than a schoolboy of six weeks' standing. . . . I have no astronomy. I do not know where to look for the Bear, or Charles's Wain; the place of any other star; or the name of any of them at sight. I guess at

Venus only by her brightness. . . . Of history and chronology I possess some vague points. . . . My friend M., with great painstaking, got me to think I understood the first proposition in Euclid, but gave me over in despair at the second. I am entirely unacquainted with the modern languages; and, like a better man than myself, have 'small Latin and less Greek.' I am a stranger to the shapes and texture of the commonest trees, herbs, flowers. . . . Not that I affect ignorance—but my head has not many mansions, nor spacious; and I have been obliged to fill it with such cabinet curiosities as it can hold without aching." Who could resist a man after so frank a confession? All our wish is that he should go on. And herein lies the charm of the type. In a familiar essay an interesting personality portrays itself.

The familiar essay is also *informal* and *conversational* in tone. It suggests an easy chair, a fire, and leisure to spend with friends. The author seems not so much to write as to talk. He is not in the public eye, but chatting pleasantly at his ease. Consequently the familiar essay is not bound by those considerations of logic and thoroughness that are necessary in a formal article. It is not methodical, with heads and sub-heads.

Like the conversation that it seems to be, it is obedient only to the mood or the whims of the author. For this reason the writing of the familiar essay has been called "the art of digressing pleasantly." In skipping lightly from one idea to another, however, the essayist must be careful of two things. He must always remain within hailing distance of a central theme and he must observe a sufficient compatibility in his moods to make it obvious that the same personality appears through the whole composition. A man who is habitually mild and tolerant is not likely to display undue irritability in what he writes, although he may protest whimsically or at times become gently satirical. These two considerations, therefore, introduce an element of form into what at first glance might appear utterly formless.

The designation "light essay" suggests still another characteristic. That is the tendency to deal with trivial and unimportant things. The familiar essay is the product of the writer's leisure and is intended for the leisure of the reader. Since it is not expected to be useful or practical, it must be agreeable. Even a mock seriousness in the title is not really misleading. Lamb's "The Two Races of Men" and "A Chapter on Ears" are

not ethnological or scientific. The two "races" in the former are merely those who borrow and those who lend; and "A Chapter on Ears" is Lamb's confession that he has no ear for music. "I am incapable of a tune. I have been practising *God Save the King* all my life; whistling and humming it over to myself in solitary corners; and am not yet arrived, they tell me, within many quavers of it . . ." The true familiar essayist sets down his thought for the amusement it affords him quite as much as for the pleasure it may give the reader. Consequently he is likely to be cheerful, often in a playful mood. Leigh Hunt illustrates this spirit in his essay "On Getting Up on Cold Mornings":

> Some people say it is a very easy thing to get up of a cold morning. You have only, they tell you, to take the resolution; and the thing is done. This may be very true; just as a boy at school has only to take a flogging, and the thing is over. But we have not at all made up our minds upon it; and we find it a very pleasant exercise to discuss the matter, candidly, before we get up. This, at least, is not idling, though it may be lying. It affords an excellent answer to those who ask how lying in bed can be indulged in by a reasoning being,—a rational

> creature. How? Why, with the argument calmly at work in one's head, and the clothes over one's shoulder. Oh—it is a fine way of spending a sensible, impartial half-hour.

The essayist's tendency to trifle does not mean that the familiar essay has nothing to give thoughtful men. On the contrary, since it is so largely a reflection of the personality of the writer, it is almost certain to reveal, consciously or unconsciously, a philosophy of life. The familiar essayist not only observes life but meditates upon it. "His main gift," says an interesting essayist, "is an eye to discover the suggestiveness of common things. . . . Let him take up the most trivial subject, and it will lead him away to the great questions over which the serious imagination loves to brood—fortune, mutability, death . . ." An illustration will make clear what is meant. In the essay on "Old China" Charles Lamb begins, lightly enough, with a pleasant confession of his fondness for old china. This leads him to remark upon a blue tea set from which he and his sister were drinking tea and which they were so fortunate then as to be able to afford. But these observations are only an excuse for a wistful reflection on the happiness of the good old

days when he and his sister were poor. He tells how he once debated then a long time over the purchase of a book that they could not afford and how he finally bought it, though the extravagance compelled him to do without a much needed new suit. In a similar vein he speaks of pictures and outings, seats at the theatre and strawberries out of season, all to show how much more we enjoy the simple pleasures obtained at some sacrifice than the luxuries which in wealth we do not appreciate. The reader puts down the essay with his thought and his deeper emotions unexpectedly stirred.

And now with this understanding of the type in mind let us turn to one or two practical suggestions about writing the familiar essay. You may be the kind of person who naturally sees in things more than appears on the surface. It may be your nature to muse over common experiences. As you walk down Broadway or Main Street on a Saturday afternoon in August, you may be interested in the character of the crowd, the look on the faces of the people; may wonder which are going away over the week-end and how they will spend their time, which will have to stay behind and what *they* will do with themselves. You

may wonder what it is that distinguishes—as it certainly does distinguish—the crowd this afternoon from the same crowd in the winter, say the Saturday before Christmas. You may ponder over these and many other things and reflect on your own situation; and if you do, you do not need to be told where to find your material for a familiar essay. But if you are not naturally reflective, do not have the habit of noticing things, you need not feel that your case is hopeless. You can still learn to write a familiar essay, for there are ways of getting the material you need.

Let us agree that there is nothing more interesting to study than human nature, the way different people act, and the things they do under various circumstances. Select, then, some situation in which you can observe people of various types and study them. For instance, stand near a telephone booth around dinner time in the evening. Observe the various types of humanity that use the phone in the course of half an hour, —quiet talkers, animated talkers, people who gesticulate, those who shout, those who dislike the operator. There is the man whose friend waits outside while he tells his wife he has to "work late at the office"; the young woman

"visiting" by telephone; the impatient man waiting his turn; the stout blonde who half suffocates in the booth; the young man having an argument with a girl. There is no end of such people and it is not hard to imagine how you would feel if you were in the place of any one of them. Or take the scales on the station platform. Who are some of the people that get weighed while you stand there? Why do they get weighed? There are the stout people who are sure the scales are inaccurate, and those who argue whether the dial reads 129½ or 130. There is the economical family who all try to get weighed for the same penny; the person who gets weighed merely for something to do while waiting for the train; the woman who only looks in the little mirror. You may recall various kinds of scales: the kind that asks you, "Did you give yourself a weigh?" and the kind where you get your money back if you guess your weight. These are scenes and characters in the human drama, and the familiar essayist delights in reflecting on life in all its aspects. There are many other places where you can study your fellow men (and women) with equally interesting results—at the box office in the theatre,

in the crowd outside the movie, in the restaurant, at the ball game, in the doctor's office.

There is another way you may go about writing the familiar essay. You may start with an idea, as did Lamb in the essay on "Old China" mentioned above, and illustrate it from your observation and experience. Suppose you say to yourself that every man has certain tests which he consciously or unconsciously applies to women, or that every woman instinctively notices certain things in men. What are some of the special susceptibilities or aversions of your friends? Does one of your friends specialize in dark eyes, another in small hands? Which one is attracted by social position, which admires bored superiority? Or, suppose you decide that you can pretty well tell what kind of people live in a house by the things they leave lying around, say on the library table. An empty candy box, a pack of cards, cigarette ashes, a tennis racquet, a Victrola record, a theatre program—all tell their story. You have only to be reasonably observant and to reflect a little on what you see to find on every hand the material for a familiar essay.

But you *must* find it yourself. You must make

your own observations, present your own ideas —in other words, be original. There is no form of writing in which you have a greater opportunity to show your own individuality than in the familiar essay. Almost any subject can be discussed in the familiar essay mood if you are in that mood. But it is useless to think that you can create the atmosphere of "friendly informality" in your essay if you attempt to write it in a crowded library a few minutes before you go to class. There is little inducement to meditation or the play of fancy in such an environment. Go off by yourself, find a comfortable chair by the open fire, and, if you are a man, light your pipe: you will more readily impart the desired tone to your essay. If it is still difficult for you to get into the right spirit, get a volume of Lamb's "Essays of Elia," or some similar collection, and read in it for a while. The spirit is likely to be contagious. Before long your frame of mind will be similar to the essayist's. Then, when you are in the mood, write.

THE END